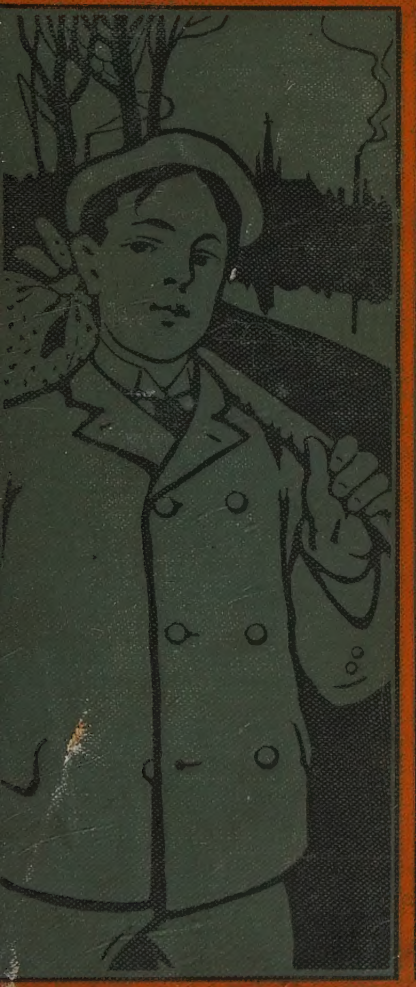
A YANKEE LAD'S PLUCK



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"Who are you?" "Felipe, the interpreter," was the reply; "and you are Bert Larkin?" "Yes!" the boy assented.—Page 174.

Yankee Lad's Pluck.

A YANKEE LAD'S PLUCK.

HOW BERT LARKIN SAVED HIS FATHER'S RANCH IN THE ISLAND OF PORTO RICO.

By WILLIAM P. CHIPMAN,

Author of "Roy Gilbert's Search," "Budd Boyd's Triumph," "The Young Minuteman," etc., etc.

With Five Page Illustrations by J. Watson Davis.

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A YANKEE LAD'S PLUCK.

By William P. Chipman.

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A YANKEE LAD'S PLUCK.

CHAPTER I.

THE INJURED SAILOR.

It was Saturday, May 15th, 1897. At Thompson's store, the largest grocery in Montville, every one, from the proprietor himself to Bert Larkin, the delivery clerk, was as busy as he could be.

The latter, a bright and active lad of about sixteen years, had just packed the last basket of groceries upon the delivery wagon, and was preparing to mount the seat, when his employer called out:

"All ready for the south route, Bert?"

"Yes, sir," the clerk answered respectfully, and waited for Mr. Thompson's next word.

"Well, hurry it up as fast as you can! Barker has gone over to Flanders with the other wagon, and you will have to make the north trip to-day."

This was so common an occurrence the lad thought nothing of it. Thompson had a regular habit of crowding double work upon his men, so he only answered:

"All right, sir; I'll be back in two hours, or thereabouts," and then he jumped into the vehicle and drove rapidly away.

Here and there through the streets in the southern part of the thriving town he went. Not a

moment was lost, and in about an hour he reached the outskirts of the village.

Stopping before a small cottage, almost hid under its load of vines, he picked out two or three parcels from one of the baskets, and, with them in his arms, ran up the path to the side door.

"Here you are, Aunt Mary," he said to a woman busy at the kitchen stove. "I'll lay these things on the step, for I'm in an awful hurry. I've got to take Barker's route to day, so you needn't expect me home to dinner. A bite of crackers and cheese will have to do me until supper-time. Good-by!" and he hastened back to the street.

"No; stop as you come back along, and I'll have a lunch put up for you," his aunt replied, stepping to the doorway and looking out at the retreating lad.

He was driving off before she had done speaking, and only shouted back:

"Very well!"

As the horse jogged along down the turnpike into the country, Bert reached back into the wagon and overhauled his baskets.

"I wish I didn't have to go up to Bailey's to-day," he soliloquized. "I forgot that when I told the boss I'd be back in two hours. It means a half-hour of extra time up Sugar Loaf hill and back, and I'm afraid I can't keep my promise. But it can't be helped now. Go on!"

The last two words were spoken to his horse, and the faithful creature quickened its pace as though it understood the haste of its driver.

Four or five stops were made in the next mile, the last one being at a house well off the main road. This took extra time, and when Bert returned to the turnpike he glanced at his watch,

"Quarter to ten!" he exclaimed in surprise. "I must reach Bailey's in the next fifteen minutes, or I

won't get back to the store anywhere near the time I calculated on."

He took up his whip and touched the horse lightly on its flank. This was such an unusual proceeding, however, the animal started down the road at a rattling pace.

The highway was now a gradual decline into a narrow valley, through which a small stream coursed. An arched bridge, built of heavy stone, and having huge stone posts at each end to support the iron rail along its side, spanned this brook.

Beyond the brook the road forked,– the left fork gradually winding away among the hills towards a large lake into which the stream emptied; the right fork turning sharply, and beginning at once the long steep ascent of Sugar Loaf hill.

It was Bert's intention not to slacken the speed of his mettled steed until he reached the foot of the hill. But in this he was disappointed. As he came upon the bridge two boys about his own age (whom he immediately recognized as Sam Thompson, the groceryman's son and Bill Ecclestone, his inseparable crony,) stood on the south end, brandishing their fishpoles in their hands.

"Stop! Stop, Bert!" they cried in chorus. "Give us a ride! Take us over to Lake Hammersly!"

"Can't do it, boys, no way," Bert responded, pulling up his horse. "I'm going the other way, over Sugar Loaf, and have got to hurry too. Barker is over at Flanders, and I have his route to day."

"Pshaw! you can drive fast, and it won't take a half-hour of your time. You've got to do it. Jump in, Bill."

It was Sam Thompson who spoke, and he hastened towards the left side of the wagon, while his friend followed, going, however, to the right.

"Here take our poles, while we get in," the merchant's son now commanded.

Bert had already formed his plan to outwit the lads. Seeming to acquiesce in their scheme, however, he took Ecclestone's pole first, saying:

"Wait a moment before you get in, Bill, I want to find a place for the poles."

He then took Sam's rod, and held the two for an instant, as though trying to adjust them tip to tip. Then, like a flash, he tossed both over the nearest railing into the brook, shouting at the same time to his horse:

"Go on, Prince!"

The animal started forward with a jump; the turn to the right was safely made, and the hill reached before the baffled boys had taken in the situation; and by the time they had recovered their fishing tackle the wagon was too far away to make it worth their while to pursue it.

Looking back the young clerk smiled to see the fists of the duped lads shaken furiously at him:

"We'll pay you for this!" they shouted.

"All right! to-morrow; next week; any time, principal and interest," he called back, little realizing how soon they were to do it, and in a way very uncomfortable to himself.

Slowing the galloping animal down to a walk, Bert glanced at his watch for the second time.

"Ten minutes coming here," he said; "allow ten minutes for going up the hill, and five more to the house, and I shall be only a few minutes later at Bailey's than I thought. Good! I may as well take this part of my journey easy."

Stretching out on the wagon-seat in as comfortable a position as possible, he summoned up all his patience, for what he knew from previous experience would be a hard climb.

Five minutes, eight minutes, passed. The top of the hill was in sight. The horse realized it, and quickened its step. Bert, however, was too com-

Bert placed his arm under the man and with a great effort lifted him out of the brook.—Page 5. *Yankee Lad's Pluck.*

fortable to move just yet, and failed to notice the bicyclist who, the next instant, came over the brow of the hill. But the wheelman saw him, and immediately shouted out:

"Port there! Port there with your craft, youngster, or I shall run you down!"

Startled by the cry the lad leaped to his feet, saw his danger, and, gripping his reins firmly, drew the horse to the left just in time. By him the wheel sped, its rider, whose garb, as well as his language, proclaimed him a sailor, evidently enjoying his ride with great glee, and having no thought of the risk he was running.

Stopping his horse, Bert leaped to the ground, and looked after the flying man. But he was already too far down the hill for the boy to have more than the merest glimpse of him.

"He can never make that turn at the bridge in safety!" the lad cried, a great terror taking possession of his heart. "Likely as not I shall find him dead there when I go back."

He jumped into his wagon, drove rapidly on to Mr. Bailey's, delivered his goods, and started on his return.

At as rapid a gait as he dared he went down the long hill. When near its foot he saw that apparently his worst fears were realized. In the middle of the bridge lay the bicycle—a complete wreck; while over the rail in the shallow water lay the sailor, his white face upturned to the sun, his eyes closed, his form motionless—to all appearances he was dead.

Hitching his horse a short distance from the bridge, Bert hastened to the side of the unconscious man. Placing his arms under him, he with a great effort lifted him out of the brook. As he did so the poor fellow groaned.

"Oh! he isn't dead," the boy cried in great relief.

Then he dipped up some water from the stream with his hands, and dashed it into the pallid face.

First there was a faint twitching of the eyelids; then the eyes opened; finally the lips moved.

"Where am I? What's happened?" a faint voice asked.

"Here by the brook. You fell from your wheel," Bert answered. "Are you much hurt, sir?"

"I remember; you are the boy I passed on the hill; then I lost control of my craft, and ran into the bridge," the man answered, trying to raise himself, but falling back with a groan.

"I can't get up, I'm in terrible pain. What shall I do?" he continued between his moans.

"I have my horse and wagon here; but I don't believe I can lift you into it alone," Bert replied. "Can you wait until I go for help?"

"I must, youngster, but be quick about it," the sailor answered with set teeth.

The lad thought a moment. The nearest house was that in the laneway, towards the village, where a half-hour before he had delivered goods. But he now recollected that the farmer and his men were at work in the field next to the turnpike. If they were still there he could secure their help in ten minutes.

To think was to act. Tossing the wrecked bicycle off the bridge, he unhitched his horse, and drove rapidly up the road. As soon as he was in sight of the working men, he called out loudly:

"Help! help! Quick! This way!"

The men heard him; saw the galloping horse; and hurried to meet him.

"What is it?" they asked as he drew in his panting beast.

In a few words he told of his discovery, and Mr. Martin, the farmer, was equal to the occasion.

"Here, John," he said to one of his men, "you go

down to the bridge and stay with the injured man. Tell him we'll be there shortly."

To Bert he added: "You must go to the house with me for a mattress. Quick!" and with the last word he jumped up beside the boy.

"We shall not need the rest of you," he called to his other workmen; "go on with your planting."

Once at the house he rapidly made his arrangements for moving the sailor.

"Toss out those baskets, Bert, while I get the bed," he directed, hurrying into the house.

In a minute he reappeared bringing a narrow mattress that just filled the wagon body. A girl followed him with two pillows and a blanket.

"We are ready," he announced, springing into the vehicle.

Bert needed no other word, and drove furiously down the lane. It could not have been over ten minutes from the time he first left the bridge before he was back there again.

Tenderly the unfortunate man was raised, and laid upon the bed. A pillow was placed under his head, and the blanket thrown over him. Then Mr. Martin sat down beside the sufferer, while John and Bert mounted the wagon seat.

"Where shall I go? To your house, Mr. Martin?" the boy asked.

"No, I guess not," the farmer said, hesitatingly.

"Look here, Captain," the sailor suddenly put in. "You needn't be afraid to take me there. I'm respectable, and have the rocks to pay all bills."

"My dear fellow," Mr. Martin hastened to say, "I was not thinking of that at all, but of your comfort. My wife is an invalid, as the lad here knows, and I have only a young girl as housekeeper. There are three hired men, myself, wife, and four small children—nine in all—as many as one woman can well care for. What you want is to go where you

can have it quiet, and get the best of care, and be near a physician. I have it, Bert; why not take him to your aunt's? It is in the village, near the doctor, and there isn't a better nurse in all Montville."

"Just as you think best, Mr. Martin," the boy replied, and so drove slowly and carefully on to his own home. But he had no idea this incident of the morning was to change his entire future.

CHAPTER II.

BERT LOSES HIS PLACE.

It took a full half hour, at the slow pace they were obliged to travel, to reach the vine-covered cottage. But when once there they had no doubt as to the warmth of their welcome.

As soon as Bert's aunt was told of the poor man's injury, she said :

"Why, of course, this is the place to bring him! If I can't nurse him back to health, no one can ; and my own room and bed are ready this minute for him."

She bustled about while the men brought the sailor in, throwing open a blind for more light, bringing extra pillows for the sufferer's head, and placing on the nearest table a bottle of camphor and other restoratives in case the man should faint.

Meantime Bert had driven on for the nearest doctor, and by the time the unfortunate fellow was removed from the narrow mattress (on which he had been brought) to the ampler and softer bed, Bert had returned with the surgeon.

Lingering only long enough to learn that three ribs and a leg of the stranger were broken, the lad took Mr. Martin and John into his wagon and drove off to the farm for his baskets.

As he came out of the laneway, on his return to the village, he overtook Ned Loomis, a lad a year older than himself, but one of his particular friends.

Young Loomis had evidently been on a tramp

through the neighboring woods, and now, with his rifle over his shoulder, was returning home.

"Give me a ride, Bert," he cried, as soon as he caught sight of the wagon.

"Certainly, Ned; jump in," was Bert's hearty rejoinder, and slowing up the horse, he waited for his comrade to mount the seat beside him. Then he drove rapidly on to the store.

The town clock on the adjacent church steeple was striking twelve when he finally reached the grocery; and the greeting he immediately met with was certainly a disconcerting one. For the first time he began to fear his long delay might work disastrously to himself.

"Do you call this two hours, you young rascal?" angrily demanded his employer, stepping out upon the sidewalk in front of the building. "It is over four, if it's a minute, and your groceries have been waiting for you more than half that time! What in the world have you been up to anyway?"

Then the eye of the enraged merchant fell on young Loomis, who had just alighted from the wagon, and he went on even more furiously:

"Oh! ho! that has been your game, has it? Dill-dallying along the road with a shot gun! Well, I'll have you understand I have no place for that kind of a clerk. Go to the cashier, get your pay, and get out of my sight before I thrash you."

"But I haven't been stopping along the way to fire any gun," protested Bert, now thoroughly alarmed lest he should lose a place that he could ill-afford to give up. I only picked up Ned a few minutes ago as I was returning to the village. He will tell you so if you only ask him. The reason for my long delay was——"

"Not another word out of you, you young reprobate," interrupted Mr. Thompson, his anger having now reached a white heat. "I've no time to hear

any trumped-up stories. Get out of that wagon, get your money and leave at once, before I take that horsewhip to you for your impudence."

Bert leaped from the wagon, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"This is unjust, Mr. Thompson," he said, "and you'll be sorry for it. I found a man injured by the roadside, and stopped long enough to bring him to town. Mr. Martin or Dr. Russell will tell you so. That is why I am so late."

"Well, what if you did? My wagon isn't an ambulance for tramps," answered the merchant scornfully. "I don't want another word with you; get your money and go."

Without another word the lad went to the cashier's desk, drew the four dollars and fifty-eight cents that was due him for five and a half days' work, and left the store.

His first thought were to go directly home, but before he reached the nearest corner he changed his mind. He would not let his aunt know of his dismissal until he had made some effort to secure another situation.

His wages were all they had to depend upon. The sick man was at the house—a burden upon them for some weeks. Nothing could be more unfortunate and discouraging than this discharge at just this time. There was no need to trouble his aunt with it, however, until he knew for certain that he could not obtain work.

All that afternoon, therefore, he went from place to place, wherever he thought they might need a boy's service, asking for employment, but finding none.

Somewhat discouraged, but determined as yet not to worry his aunt with the misfortune which, from no fault of his own, had befallen him, he went to the house for his supper.

He found his aunt sitting in a low rocker just outside of her bedroom door, and was told in reply to his anxious inquiry that the sailor was sleeping quietly, and would doubtless recover from his injuries.

"His name is Jack Barnes, and he belongs over at Goodport," his aunt explained in a low tone, as she followed the boy out into the kitchen to give him his supper.

"It seems he recently landed in Boston, and then visited his native place, where he had not been for years. Seeing some old friend there riding a bicycle he took a notion to ride one too, and, with a sailor's recklessness, started off for a long journey over an unknown road the moment he regarded himself able to manage the wheel.

"His coast down Sugar Loaf hill was another exhibition of his recklessness, and ended in his terrible accident. Attempting to turn on to the bridge at the foot of the hill, he struck the stone post on the right, throwing him first against the iron railing, and then over into the brook itself. The first fall, the doctor says, broke his ribs; and the second, his limb. A pretty severe punishment for his foolhardiness."

"I should think so," admitted Bert. "Anyway, I don't want to try his trip down the hill, and I don't believe he ever will again. It's a wonder it didn't kill him. I really thought he was dead when I first caught a glimpse of his white face and motionless form. I can see him now," and the boy shuddered as he recalled the sickening sight.

On finishing his supper he asked his aunt if there was anything he could do for her.

"Nothing," she said; "Mr. Hunt has offered to come in and watch with the sick man to-night, and you'll be at home to-morrow, so we shall get along nicely."

"Very well," he responded, taking his hat and leaving the house as though going to the store.

He spent the evening, as he had the afternoon, hunting for work, but was still unsuccessful. At about the usual hour for home-coming on Saturday evenings, he came in for the night.

Mr. Hunt, their nearest neighbor, was already installed in the bedroom, and his aunt had retired. He, therefore, stopped only long enough to ascertain that the injured man was resting quietly, then he too went to bed.

But he was up early the next morning, and promptly relieved the watcher from his long vigil. Mr. Barnes was awake, and greeted the lad with a hearty good morning. He made no further attempt at conversation, however, until they were alone. Then he asked:

"In whose house am I, youngster?"

"My aunt's, Miss Mary Wheeler's," the lad answered.

"Why, she is the very woman I was coming over here to see," the man ejaculated.

Then, ignoring Bert's surprised look, he continued:

"And who are you?"

"Bert Larkin, her nephew."

The sailor actually raised himself upon one elbow and gazed curiously at the boy.

"Bert Larkin," he repeated. "Any relative of Captain Albert Larkin, who married Miss Wheeler's younger sister, Annie?"

"He was my father," the lad replied, "though I never saw him."

"Bless ye, ye didn't die when a little chap now, did ye? How tickled the captain will be when I tell him that," and the man laughed in evident pleasure.

"Why, sir, do you know my father? Is he living? Where is he? We've long thought him dead,"

were the boy's rapid questions; and his tones told of the amazement he was in.

"The captain thought you were dead, and you thought the captain was dead. What a muss now that was, to be sure! Well, thank God, Jack Barnes can straighten it out middling quick.

"Is your father alive, lad? Of course he is, or was less than a month ago when I left him. And wasn't his last word to me: 'Don't forget, Jack, to go over to Montville, and see if my poor wife's sister, Mary Wheeler, is still living, and how she is faring too. A word from the old home will be welcome, though I've never seen the time for sixteen years I've felt I could go back there myself.' And that's how I'm here, bless ye heart."

"Father alive! Father sent you here! I can hardly believe it," cried the bewildered Bert. "Tell me all about it; where he is; why he hasn't ever come to see me;" and there was an intense pleading in every utterance of the boy.

Before the sailor could answer, a step was heard at the bedroom door. Turning, the lad saw his aunt, with a bowl of steaming broth in her hands. Her first words showed, moreover, that she had heard enough of her nephew's last remark to understand the nature of the conversation that was being held. For, setting the dish down on the stand at the head of the bed, she immediately exclaimed:

"My brother-in-law, Captain Albert Larkin, sent you here! Pray, where is he, and"—hesitatingly now—"and why haven't we heard something from him in all these years, Mr. Barnes?"

The sailor gave her a searching look as he answered:

"He is in Porto Rico, ma'am; you only wait until I'm a bit stronger, and we'll compare notes. I guess we can then tell *why* it is he hasn't ever sent you any word."

"Of course we'll wait until you are stronger," she said quickly, and with some show of relief in her tones. "Go, Bert, and eat your breakfast. It's on the table, and I have Mr. Barnes's breakfast here."

Eager as Bert was to learn more of the father he had never seen, and of whom he had heard but little, he realized there was wisdom in his aunt's decision. But his heart beat quickly, and his thoughts chased each other in wildest confusion, as he entered the kitchen and sat down to partake of a meal for which his appetite had suddenly vanished.

CHAPTER III.

A SMALL FORTUNE.

Several times during that long Sunday Bert was on the point of telling his aunt of his dismissal from the store, but checked himself each time, thinking: "Maybe to-morrow I shall find another job, and there is no need of worrying her about it; especially now she has this sick man to care for."

One of his duties as an employee of Mr. Thompson had been to care for the horses. This necessitated early rising on his part, and, in order to keep the fact that he had lost his place from his aunt, he, on Monday morning, got up at his usual time. It was, therefore, scarcely five o'clock when he came down-stairs into the little kitchen.

Early as it was, however, his aunt was there before him, busily engaged in getting his breakfast. It was soon ready, and while the lad ate, she talked away to him about their unexpected guest.

Mr. Williams, another near neighbor, who had watched with the sailor the previous night, had just gone, and alluding to him, Miss Wheeler said:

"Neighbor Williams tells me that Mr. Barnes has slept soundly all night, and that he is quite sure we shall not need watchers any longer. He says if you are only willing to sleep on the sitting-room lounge, within call of the sick man, that is all that will be necessary. I hate to ask it of you, after your day of hard work at the store, but if you will do it, I can look out for the poor fellow days, and we need trouble our neighbors no further."

"Of course I'll do that, or anything else to help you, Aunt Mary," Bert replied quickly, wondering what she would say if she knew he was no longer in the store.

Then, partly to turn the conversation from what he considered dangerous ground, and partly because he believed it might relieve her anxiety as to all expense connected with her unexpected patient, he told her what the injured man had said to Mr. Martin about his ability to pay the costs connected with the accident, adding:

"I don't believe we shall lose anything, Auntie, in having him here."

"I'm not thinking of pay," she responded quickly. "I should give him the best care possible whoever he was. But what he has already said to you shows that he was coming over to Montville on purpose to look me up, as a special messenger from your father. That makes our duty to care for him all the stronger; and when able he will make his business known. But it seems strange, Bert, to think of your father as living, when for so long a time we have regarded him as dead."

"Yes," the boy assented. "I can't make it seem real to me; and there's another thing I don't understand, Aunt Mary. Admit that father thought I was dead—though I don't see what reason he had for thinking so—why has he neglected you so long? Surely you had a claim on him."

"Not a very strong one, Bert, I guess," his aunt said, in a constrained voice. Then she went on hurriedly, as though anxious to get through with what she had to say.

"I wanted this talk with you this morning, Bert. I've laid awake nearly all night thinking about it. You mustn't blame your father at all, child. I'm to blame for his long silence. There are some things connected with this affair I have never told you—

perhaps never should have told you but for this visit of the sailor.

"When he gets ready to tell you his story, however, I'll tell you mine; and, as he intimated yesterday, when we come to compare notes we shall be able to explain your father's prolonged silence. I only hope you won't hate me, Bert. I can stand everything but that," and, throwing her arms about the boy's neck, she wept bitterly.

"Of course, I am not going to hate you, Aunt Mary," replied the puzzled lad. "Who has cared for me from my birth, working and sacrificing every way to feed and clothe and educate me? I owe everything to you, and love you better than any one else in all the world," and he kissed her repeatedly.

His words and caresses reassured her, and drying her tears, she allowed him to finish his breakfast.

Just as he arose from the table, there came a knock at the door. Miss Wheeler opened it, and Ned Loomis came in.

"Good morning, Miss Wheeler," he said, politely removing his cap.

"Hello, Bert! This is an early call, isn't it? But I've come on an errand for father. Saunders, one of the teamsters at the mill, is sick, and pa says you can have his job, if you want it."

"Why, he is in the store, and can't work for your father!" exclaimed Miss Wheeler, secretly glad of it. She had the foolish pride so common with many, that to be a clerk in a store was more genteel than to be a mill-hand.

At the same moment, however, Bert exclaimed in great joy:

"This is due to you, Ned," and he grasped his friend's outstretched hand, giving it a hearty shake. "I know it is, for I called at the mill for work on Saturday afternoon, and the overseer told me there were no vacancies."

"What do you mean, Bert?" asked his aunt, bewildered by the lad's words.

Sure of work, Bert now told her of his discharge from the store, and the reason for it.

"To think Thompson would do such a thing!" she cried, indignantly. "He hasn't a spark of humanity about him, not to mention common decency! Well, I knew he was close and stingy, but I didn't think he was quite as mean as this!"

"That is just what father said," put in Ned. "You see, Miss Wheeler," he explained, "I heard Thompson threaten to dismiss Bert, and waited long enough to see if it really happened. Then I hurried home and told father. He went down street almost immediately and saw Dr. Russell, who, as you know, attended the sailor; and later he drove out to Mr. Martin's and had a talk with him. The result was he came home determined that Bert should lose nothing by what he called his 'humane act.'

"Last night, just as I was going to bed, he told me I was to come down here before six this morning, and tell Bert he could have Saunders' place until there is something better for him. I suspect," he also added with a grin, "that, from some things mother says, father went around to Thompson's before he came home Saturday night, and told him just what he thought of him."

Mr. Loomis was the proprietor of the Montville Woolen Mills, and employed nearly two hundred hands. As the village was five miles from the nearest railroad station (that at Flanders), all the raw material for the manufactory had to be carted from that depot, and the manufactured goods taken over to it. This kept four teams constantly on the road, and the work assigned to Bert, as we have seen, was that of Saunders', one of the regular teamsters.

While the lad naturally would have preferred some other employment, he was glad to secure this. He, therefore, now said :

" I'll report at the mill promptly, Ned, and thank you again for your kindness."

With a frank assertion that he had done nothing to be thanked for, young Loomis departed. His parting sentence, however, had evidently been saved for that moment.

" Oh ! I say, Bert, I was also to tell you that you were to have the same pay father gives Saunders, one dollar and a half per day."

Perhaps the happiest boy in the whole town was Bert Larkin, when, fifteen minutes later, he reported himself at the mill office as ready for work.

Mr. Loomis was there ; and, looking the boy over from head to foot, as though measuring his spirit and ability, he remarked :

" I see you are ready for your job, my lad."

" Yes, sir, and thankful for it too, ' the boy replied heartily.

" I presume, though, there are things you would prefer to teaming," said the manufacturer, quizzically.

" Yes, sir," the lad responded slowly ; " I suppose we all have our preferences, but I'm not above any honest work."

" That's right, and I admire your spirit," the gentleman answered, decidedly. " But the fact is, Bert, we shall keep you at this only a short time. We hope to find a better berth for you.

" You may go around to the mill stables now," he continued. " You will find Brown, our oldest teamster, waiting you there. He has orders to help you in your loading and unloading, and you are to follow him in your driving. One round trip each forenoon and afternoon is what we expect of you. Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Loomis," said the boy hastening off to his work.

An hour later, perched high on his load of wooden cases, he followed Brown over the hills towards Flanders.

Perhaps a half hour after Bert's departure from the little cottage, Miss Wheeler carried in the breakfast of her patient, which he ate with evident relish.

"I guess, ma'am," he said, when he was done, "that that farmer was right when he suggested I had better be stowed in here. You certainly know how to care for a sick man. I'm much obliged to you, ma'am. But if I may ask, where's that boy, the captain's son? I haven't seen him this morning."

"No, sir, he went to his work some time ago," she replied.

"Where does he work, ma'am? Some store, I should judge by his turnout?" the sailor next inquired.

"He did work at Thompson's grocery — has worked there for about a year. But he went to a new place this morning," she explained.

"I'd have you know, sir," she went on with evident pride, "he graduated from our grammar school last June at the head of his class, and I wanted him to go on into the high school, and perhaps to college, if we could bring it about. But he said, 'No.' That I'd worked long enough for him, and now he was going to care for me. So he went right down to Thompson's grocery, and hired out. He's a good boy, sir, if there ever was one."

"What wages did he get there?" Mr. Barnes now questioned.

"Five dollars a week, sir; but he is to have a dollar and a half a day at the mill where he began work this morning."

She did not think it necessary to explain any

farther why Bert had changed the place of his employment.

"Is that all you have had to live on, ma'am?" the sick man asked, bluntly.

Though Miss Wheeler regarded her guest as unnecessarily inquisitive she replied, simply,

"Except a little I earn by my sewing. I used to go out nursing some, but Bert will not allow that now. You see I own the cottage, and we have some fruit, and a garden, and the chickens. So we get on quite nicely, sir."

"Humph! The captain's son working in a store for five dollars a week! Gone to work now at a mill like any common laborer! His wages all he and his aunt has to live on!" ejaculated the man. "Ginger and pepper! what would the captain say to that?"

As Miss Wheeler did not feel any obligation resting on her to answer the question, she said nothing. A moment later she took up her patient's dishes and went back to her kitchen.

While busy at the sink the call-bell she had placed on the stand beside the invalid rang out sharply.

She hastened to the bedroom.

"What is it, sir?" she inquired.

"Does that youngster come home to dinner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him in here to me at once, please."

There was a decisiveness about the words that suggested he wished to settle some important matter; but whatever it was he did not make known.

"Very well," she replied, and returned to her work.

So when Bert, having made his first round trip over to the Flanders station, came to his dinner, he was told that Mr. Barnes wished to see him at once.

Stepping along to the door of the bedroom, the lad said, cheerily:

"How are you to-day, Mr. Barnes? Better, I hope? I had counted on running in for a few minutes after dinner to see you; but as aunt says there is something special you wish to see me about, I came in at once. What is it, sir?"

"Call your aunt," the sailor replied, somewhat brusquely.

The boy obeyed, and when both were in the bedroom, their guest put his hand into the bosom of his shirt, and drew out a long leather pocketbook. Opening it, he took out a slip of paper, and passed it over to Miss Wheeler, saying:

"The captain sent that to you."

A glance showed the astonished woman that it was a draft on a well known banking firm in New York City for one thousand dollars, payable to her order.

"The captain sent this to me!" she exclaimed. "A thousand dollars! What shall I do with it, Bert? I never had so much money before in all my life," and there was real dismay in her tones.

"Oh! I guess you will find some way to use it, Auntie," he answered, laughing happily. "I don't wonder you are puzzled though; it seems a fortune, doesn't it?"

"It is a fortune," said his aunt, emphatically. Then she asked in quick concern: "You are sure the captain hasn't robbed himself, Mr. Barnes?"

The sailor laughed immoderately. "Robbed himself!" he cried. "Now that is rich, isn't it? I should shake myself to pieces, if it didn't hurt so. Robbed himself? Well, hardly."

"Here, lad," he now called to Bert, "take this," passing him the wallet. "There is nearly five hundred dollars in there; take it, and pay the expenses of this ranch until I'm on my feet."

"There's another thing you must do, sir," he continued; "you must quit that mill. The captain

would never forgive me for allowing you to work there, when he has plenty. So quit you must."

"And look here, ma'am," he added to Miss Wheeler, "put a girl into that kitchen to do the hard work, and find a man to wait on me. It isn't the thing for either of you to care for old Jack Barnes. Now it isn't, sure," and the man sank back upon his pillows quite out of breath from his long speech.

"But, Mr. Barnes, isn't this your money?" Bert objected, the color rising to his cheeks. "If so, I can't take it, sir."

"Of course it's my money," he broke in; "who said it wasn't? But bless you, the captain will make me good, ten to one, if need be. Go ahead both of you, and do as I say, and leave me alone. I'm tired," and he shut his mouth with a snap that seemed to lock his jaws, for the present at least, for they could get nothing more out of him.

CHAPTER IV.

AUNT MARY'S CONFESSION.

In the kitchen there was an animated discussion between the aunt and nephew. It ended in the lad's taking the draft, properly indorsed, and four hundred dollars of the money, to the village bank, where the entire amount was deposited to Miss Wheeler's credit.

As Bert came down the bank steps he met Mr. Thompson. That gentleman was in any but the best frame of mind. Not only had Mr. Loomis been to him and expressed in no mild language his opinion of a man who discharged a clerk for playing the part of the Good Samaritan to an unfortunate stranger, but Dr. Russell, and Judge Peabody, and several other prominent citizens of the village, had emphatically denounced the merchant's act as an outrage, and their denouncements had been faithfully reported to the groceryman by the village busybodies. Even the clerks in the store, with whom Bert was a general favorite, had been overheard commenting on what they termed "the meanest freak of a dreadfully mean boss."

Nor was this all. Some of the best customers had called at the store, asking for their accounts, and intimating they preferred to trade elsewhere. To lose the good opinion of his neighbors was to Thompson a small matter compared with losing a few dollars in his sales. He was almost ready, therefore, to admit that possibly he had made a mistake in discharging his young clerk.

On the way to the bank to make a deposit he was brooding over this matter, and, hard as it was to do it, had concluded the best stroke of policy for him under the circumstances would be to ask Bert to return to his old position. And just as he came to this conclusion he suddenly came face to face with the boy himself.

"Hey there, Bert," he stammered, "you can come back to the store again, if you wish to."

The lad mistrusted what it was that had led to this rather ungracious offer of his old clerkship, and mischievously decided to draw out his late employer, and see how much he wanted him.

"At what wages, Mr. Thompson?" he questioned.

"Why the same as before, of course," snapped the man.

"I can't think of it," replied Bert, gravely.

This was a new aspect of the question to the merchant, and he paused a moment to consider it. Finally, deciding it might be something to his credit to have it said he took his clerk back at increased wages, he cautiously inquired:

What will you come back for then?"

"Ten dollars," said the boy coolly; "you see I'm getting nine at my new job."

"Ten dollars!" exclaimed the now angry man. "I'll let you and your aunt go to the poorhouse first."

"We sha'n't move there this month, Mr. Thompson," Bert retorted, with a laugh, as he hurried away.

When at the mill he told Mr. Loomis enough of the sailor's story to explain the reason for his unexpected request, and then asked to be released from his position as teamster at the close of the day.

"Certainly, my dear boy," the kind-hearted man replied; "you may go now if you prefer, and I sincerely congratulate you on your good fortune."

"I know you mean it, Mr. Loomis," said the lad, "and therefore, thank you; and before I go I want

to assure you I appreciate the interest you took in me, and the place you offered me, at a time when I was in sore trouble and knew not where I should find my next work. I shall never forget it, sir;" and, so after a half-day's service as a mill-employee, Bert left.

But the changes which the sailor had proposed in the working force of the household were never carried out.

"I have run that kitchen for more than twenty-five years, and I don't propose to give it up to any one else while I'm able to attend to it," was Miss Wheeler's invariable answer; "and as for having another man in this house to wait on, I simply won't. With nothing else for you to do, Bert, it is a pity if we can't take care of Mr. Barnes ourselves. It's all nonsense that we are too good to wait on him!" and she had her way.

The next day was one of heavy storm. The rain poured in torrents; and the wind blew in unceasing gusts. Compelled to keep the house Bert found an interesting book, and for an hour or two read aloud to his aunt and Mr. Barnes.

Then the latter spoke up: "Put up your book for a while, Bert. Somehow what you have been reading has set me to thinking of the captain. I'm strong enough now to talk over the whole matter with your aunt, and if she is willing we'll compare log-books."

Miss Wheeler flushed a little at his words, but readily assented.

"If you please then, ma'am," he began, "I'll have you spin your yarn first, for I suspect mine begins about where yours ends."

"I am anxious to tell my part of the story," answered she; "though some of it will not be entirely to my credit.

"Nineteen years ago Captain Albert Larkin met

my sister Annie for the first time. She had gone over to Goodport to spend two weeks with a former schoolmate, and while there made his acquaintance. It was a case of love at first sight on their part, and as the captain was to sail soon on a voyage to South America, he desired to be married immediately.

"I objected to this for several reasons: First, because Annie was so young—she was only eighteen—ten years younger than myself—and seemed to me, who had been her sole guardian since mother's death, still a child.

"Then the captain was thirty-eight, old enough, I thought, to be Annie's father rather than her husband, and I did not hesitate to say so.

"Again, I declared that the two weeks the captain and she had known each other were not a long enough acquaintance on which to base a union which must be for life.

"Furthermore, for I was looking for every objection possible, I found fault with the captain's occupation, that would keep him so much of the time away from his wife.

"I see now that an insane jealousy on my part was the real cause of my obstinacy. I was not willing that my sister should care for another more than she did for me. But at the time I thought I was honest in the objection I made. I ended by telling Annie she could not be married in her old home with my consent.

"I was not prepared for her quiet and dignified answer: 'I am the one to decide a question which concerns my future happiness, Mary, and not you,' she said. 'Naturally I should prefer to be married here, but it is not necessary. Other arrangements can be made. We will have no more words over this unfortunate affair.'

"She was much in her own room after that, but I was too angry to try to secure her confidence.

"A week later the captain drove to the door in a hack. Annie came down from her chamber dressed for a journey. To the captain she said: 'My trunk is ready in the room at the head of the stairs.' To me she added: 'We are going from here to the minister's, where we shall be married. Then we drive directly to Goodport, and I shall sail with my husband for Rio de Janeiro. I hold no hard feelings against you, Mary. Until now you have been the kindest of sisters, and I shall write you often. Good-by!'

"In my angriest mood I had anticipated no such radical step on the part of my usually gentle and yielding sister as this, and I was so struck dumb at her announcement, I answered her not a word. The next moment she was gone.

"Many a time during the following months I repented bitterly of my folly, and often upbraided myself for having driven my sister from a home which was as much hers as mine.

"Occasionally a letter came from her, always breathing a spirit of love for me, always telling of her happiness with her husband. From South America the captain took a freight for England, and then for the coast of Africa, and it was over two years before they came home.

"One spring day, however, unexpectedly to myself, they drove to the door; Annie, looking more matronly, but the same dear, loving sister, that she had always been; the captain dignified, yet friendly, if I cared to be so. The announcement they soon made filled me with delight: Annie was to remain with me, if I were willing, while the captain made his next voyage.

"The next three months were the happiest of my life; then came its greatest sorrow: Bert here was born, and his mother died.

"The captain was too far away to be reached in

time for the funeral, and as the sole mourner I followed her to the grave. I think now I must have been nearly crazy with my grief, for I wrote the captain telling him not of what I counted his loss, but mine, charging him with my sister's death, declaring heartlessly that his child was so weak and puny it would doubtless be dead long before he got my letter, and ending with the assertion that I never wished to see his face again.

"I wonder now that he ever replied to my letter, but he did; and how kindly he wrote you shall yourselves judge, for I have always kept his answer."

She arose, went to an old bureau in the corner of the bedroom, and from its drawer brought the manuscript.

"Read it, Bert," she said, thrusting it into the boy's hand.

He glanced at the sheet, and saw his father's handwriting for the first time. It had a fascination for him, and for a while he looked it over. Then with a husky voice he read:

"Barcelona, Spain.
"Oct 10, 1881.

"Dear Sister Mary:

"Your letter is before me, and I am asking myself can its contents be true? Am I wifeless? Childless? From this hour must I go alone through life, without Annie's guiding hand and loving heart? God pity me!

"I will not be selfish in my grief. I recognize how the deep sense of your own loss has led you to write as you would not have written under other circumstances. May the good Lord help you also.

"I enclose a draft for five hundred dollars. Will you use it to pay all expenses connected with Annie's illness, death and burial? Also place a suitable stone at her grave, and at the grave of our

child, if he be dead. The remainder, if any, use for yourself.

"My address will remain the same for some months, and I shall expect to hear from you again before long, especially if my boy lives (a hope I hardly dare cherish), for I shall then return to my native land. Otherwise you are likely to have your wish, and never see my face again.

"Your brother,

"ALBERT LARKIN."

As Bert ceased his reading his aunt continued:

"When that letter reached me, baby Bert, instead of dying, had grown into a fat, healthy child. I had become greatly attached to him, and feared, if the captain learned he was alive, he would come and take him from me. Under that fear I committed the great wrong of my life. *I never wrote the captain.* From that fact alone he must have believed, as I then hoped he would, that his child was dead."

For some time her sobs alone broke the stillness; then Bert went over to her side and put his arms about her.

"Don't, Aunt Mary," he pleaded; "you meant all right; your error came through your great love for me. I forgive it, and I believe father will. We can be happy yet. But let us hear Mr. Barnes's story."

With a great effort Miss Wheeler regained control of herself, and then she and the lad waited for the sailor to speak.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT ANVIL PLANTATION.

The sailor brushed away a suspicious moisture from his own eyes, cleared his throat two or three times, as though some obstacle was choking him, then he said:

"As I suspected, ma'am, my story begins about where yours ends. Leastwise the threads don't overlap much, and 'twon't take much of a splice to make mine fit right on to yours.

"I was a schoolmate of the captain, and, like him, always had a love for the sea. But my father and mother objected so strongly to a sailor's career for their only child, I yielded to their wishes as long as they lived.

"But when Captain Larkin left his wife here, and sailed for Europe, my parents were dead, and I was free to carry out my long cherished purpose. I shipped as a green hand on the captain's vessel, and so was with him when your letter reached him.

"He called me into his cabin, and read the sad message it contained. When he had finished he said:

"'Jack, my boy as well as my wife must now be dead. I have, therefore, nothing to go home for. Instead of looking for a cargo for the States, I shall go anywhere I can pick up a freight. It is no more than fair to tell you of this, so you may, if you choose, ship on some vessel sailing home.'

"'Captain,' I replied, 'I have no one in the

States that has as much claim on me as yourself. We've always been friends, and I shall stay by you.'

"He seemed pleased, and added: 'When we sail, Jack, you shall be in the cabin as second mate.'

"We got a freight for San Juan, Porto Rico, and carried two passengers, an old Spaniard, Don Maximo Buvinéz, and his grandchild. The latter was a bright little fellow of five, an orphan, and the grandfather had made the voyage from Porto Rico to Spain on purpose to obtain the lad. He was now taking him to his own estate in the island for which we were sailing.

The old Don was reserved, and made friends with us slowly. Not so with the lad, however; he was soon the pet of both officers and crew.

"The captain particularly took to the child, perhaps through the thought of the boy he had himself lost; and it was no uncommon sight to see the captain walking the quarterdeck with little Maximo (for the child had his grandfather's name) in his arms.

"One day when we were about half across the ocean, there was a sudden squall. All of us were busy securing sail, and putting the ship into shape to run before the gale, and did not notice the boy, until there was a quick lurch of the vessel; then a plunge, followed by a loud shriek, which told the story. The lad was overboard.

"The captain himself was the first to notice the accident, and instantly his commands rang out loud and clear:

"'Mr. Harlow,'—he was chief mate—'heave to the ship. Mr. Barnes,'—that was me—'man the lifeboat and pick me up.'

"While speaking he was throwing off his boots and coat; as he finished he plunged overboard after the boy.

"There was some lively work done in the next

half-hour. By the time the ship was brought into the wind, the life-boat was ready to be lowered. I sprang in, with six as good men as ever pulled an oar.

"The waves ran high, and half the time we were in the trough of the sea. But each time we rose on a crest I looked anxiously about me, steering all the time in the direction I thought the captain had gone.

"For some minutes we saw nothing, and heard nothing but the whistling of the storm. I was 'most ready to give up all hopes of saving either the captain or the boy, when a shout a little to the starboard attracted our attention, and there, buffeting those great billows, as quietly as though on the calmest water, was the captain, with the little fellow clasped in his arms.

"The next instant we were alongside of him, and in a moment more we had pulled him and his burden into the boat. Both he and the lad were conscious, and the captain's one thought was still for the comfort of the child.

"'Your coat, Mr. Barnes,' he said, and as he wrapped the boy in it he gave the order:

"'Back to the ship, as soon as possible, lads.'

"We didn't need any special urging along that line, however; and gave way with hearty good-will. It was a hard pull, and I can't say we should have ever reached the vessel had not the squall swept over almost as suddenly as it came. The sea still remained rough, but we didn't have the wind to pull against, and so reached the vessel at last.

"The happiest man I ever saw was that old Don, when the boy, clothed in my jacket, piped up in his Spanish:

"'Here I am, grandpa, all right. Captain Larkin came overboard after me.'

"Well, it did seem as though the old Spaniard

couldn't do enough for us all. As for the captain, that brave act of his made him the greatest hero on earth in the eyes of the Don. He almost worshiped him.

"And when he learned of the sorrow the captain had recently passed through, he took that youngster and put him into the officer's arms, saying: 'He's yours, as well as mine. But for you I shouldn't have him at all.'

"When we reached port, he gave every sailor on board fifty pesos, and every officer one hundred, except the captain. To him he said:

"'You must go out to my estate with me,' and he would not take no for an answer.

"Mr. Harlow, our chief mate, decided to leave the vessel here, as he wanted to get back to the States. So I was made first officer, and put in charge of the ship while the captain was away.

"When he came back he remarked to me:

"'Jack, I never saw such a plantation as that of the old Don. It is up in the extreme northeastern part of the island, where there is the highest peak of the Luquillo range, known as El Yunque, or, as we should say in English, The Anvil. It curiously resembles the blacksmith's block in its shape, and looms up there at the very least four thousand five hundred feet high.

"'On the southern slope of this mountain, and running from the valley up under the sharp point of The Anvil, is the Don's estate of nearly fifteen thousand acres. It consists of forests of valuable woods, of fields of tobacco and cotton, of orchards of bananas, and oranges and lemons, and plantains, and pineapples, of lowlands of sugar-cane and rice. Stretching as it does from the lowest valley to the mountain peak, there is hardly a crop of the tropics that is not prolific there. Little Maximo will have a fine property one of these days.'

"But that wasn't all the captain had to tell. The old Spaniard was interested in the firm to whom our cargo had been consigned, and through his influence one of their finest freight and passenger steamers, plying between San Juan and Barcelona, had been offered Captain Larkin. It meant a permanent place and a big salary for him, and if I would go along with him as his first officer, he was going to accept.

"I said 'yes' as soon as the captain mentioned it, and two weeks later, with the old brig sold at a good price for the coasting trade, we sailed for Spain in charge of as fine a craft, for her trade and tonnage, as ever floated.

"Nearly every time we returned to the island the old Don and the boy were at the city waiting to see the captain; sometimes they made the trip with us; and occasionally the captain went out to the plantation for a short visit.

"Matters went on this way until about seven years ago. I remember the time well, for instead of seeing the old Spaniard and his grandson, an old servitor from the estate came on board, as soon as we were in the harbor, with a note for the captain.

"It told him little Maximo was dead—had died of the fever—and that the old Don lay very low with the same fatal disease. It furthermore requested him to come down to the plantation at once.

"Stopping only long enough to report the voyage to the agents, he obeyed this imperative summons.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTAIN'S DREAM.

"At the time of the steamer's sailing," continued Mr. Barnes, "the captain had not returned, and so, for the first time in my life, I made a voyage under another skipper. When I got back to the island a few weeks later, however, I found Captain Larkin waiting for me.

"His story was as astonishing as it was simple. The old Don was also dead, but before dying he had deeded all of his property in Porto Rico to the captain and his heirs forever.

"For little Maximo's sake the estate was dear to the captain, and he had decided to give up a seafaring life, and devote himself to the care and development of the plantation.

"'And what I want, Jack,' he went on, 'is this: that you also quit the steamer, and come down to the Anvil with me as my overseer or agent. The estate is too large for one man to handle, and I need some one with me whom I can trust as I do myself.'

"I was too attached to the captain to leave him now, and partly for that reason, and partly for the handsome financial offer he made me, I gave up my position, and went down to the plantation with him.

"Of course I'd already formed some idea of the hacienda from what the captain had told me; but, bless you, he had been altogether too modest in his

way of putting it. The old Don was a good deal of a business man for a Spaniard, and had brought the estate to a degree of cultivation hardly surpassed in the whole island.

"Valleys, and hills, and mountain-side, were dotted with native huts; a thousand laborers toiled in the forests, and orchards, and fields. Already the revenues of the plantation were enormous; and yet as nothing beside what Yankee enterprise and ingenuity could make them.

"It was not long before the captain had his plans of operation matured. The estate was to be divided into small districts, and each placed under a *gefe*, or native chief, who was to report at regular intervals to me, the head agent.

"Machinery, to lighten the labor of the workmen, and to increase the productive area of the estate, was to be brought in from the States. Direct shipment of the products to the most available ports was to be arranged for.

"The oversight of these improvements, the bringing in of needed supplies, and the paying off the laborers have kept the captain and myself busy indeed.

"For seven years this has been our life. Thus is it that the Anvil has become a home to us; and neither one of us expected to come to our native land again until two or three weeks ago. Then our whole plans were suddenly changed by a dream of the captain.

"I remember the morning well. I had gone into the dining-room for my lunch and coffee, before making my usual round among the overseers, and to my surprise found the captain there before me. He looked pale and distracted, and I said to him:

"'What's up, Captain? Don't you feel well?'

"'Not very, Jack,' he admitted, slowly. 'I didn't sleep much last night, and all from a dream I had.'

She led me into the back chamber, and there lying on the bed was a lad of about sixteen years. "Our boy," she said, and vanished.—Page 39.

Yankee Lad's Pluck.

"'That's strange, Captain,' I responded. 'You aren't often troubled that way.'

"'No,' he answered; and then continued softly, almost reverently:

"'I saw Annie last night, Jack, as plainly as I now see you. She came and sat down by my bedside, saying: "Albert, come with me."

"'I arose, and taking her by the hand, she led me out of the house. At first I wondered if I was not already in heaven, and so reunited with my loved wife forever.

"'But the way she led me was earthly enough. Across the mountains to San Juan, over the sea by steamer to New York, by train to Goodport, and by team to Montville.

"'Once in the village she took me to the graveyard. It was moonlight, and I had no difficulty in seeing every object around me. I looked for two marble shafts, marking the places of my dead, but I saw but one—a simple stone, on which my wife's name and age, and date of decease, were engraved clearly.

"'I wondered that there was no stone for my child, and looked questioningly at my wife. "Come with me," she again said, and led me out of the cemetery, and down the street to the vine-clad cottage—her old home.

"'Into the house, up the stairs, and into the back chamber, we went; and lying there on the bed, sleeping quietly, was a lad of about sixteen years. There was a look of my wife in the boy's face, and I needed not her next exclamation to tell me who he was.

"'"Our boy," she said, and vanished.

"'I awoke, Jack, and found it was a dream. But I couldn't throw off the impression it made upon me; and lying there wide awake, I thought the matter over.

"'It was true that I had heard nothing in all those years from the old home; but Mary might have written a dozen times, and the letters never have reached me. It might be that my boy was really alive.

"'And, Jack, I will tell you what I have concluded. It is to send you to America. I won't go myself, for, if there should be nothing in my dream, I couldn't stand it. I couldn't any way. But you shall go.

"'Visit your old home and friends first, if you care to; but go also over to Montville, and see how it is with Mary; and if,—if the boy is really alive —send me word—cable it at once to my bankers in San Juan. For I shall arrange with them to send any message that comes from you down here by a special courier.

"'Then write me in full all about the lad—your impressions of him—and I will then decide whether to return to the States myself, or have you bring the boy out here to me.

"'If he is dead, and my dream has no more to it than dreams usually do—then see that Mary is provided for, for she may be in need. I see now that I ought not to have neglected her as I have.

"'This is asking much of you, Jack; but I must know whether I have a living child or not. I can't shake off the impression my dream has made, until I have positive information from the old home that the boy really died in his infancy, as I have so long believed. Name your own price for the service, old and faithful friend; but say you will go.'

"There were tears in his eyes, and pleading in his voice, as he held out his hand to me, to seal the compact.

"Grasping it heartily, I answered:

"'Of course I will go, Captain,' and the next day I started.

"I had to wait a little in San Juan for a steamer, but took the first one that sailed, a fruiter bound for Boston. Ten days later I landed in that city, and by the first train came up to Goodport, my native town.

"I hardly knew the place, it had grown so, but found little change in the old farm on its suburbs, where I was born, and where father and mother died. The cousin to whom I sold the place before I went to sea was still there, and welcomed me as one from the dead.

"What I ought to have done was to have had sense enough to come over here by team or on horseback—something I am used to. But my cousin had a bicycle, and declared he had frequently ridden over here on it to see his married daughter. I was at once fascinated with the idea of learning to ride, and then making my own trip over here on a wheel. So I began to learn, and in a few days, thinking I had mastered the whole business, set out—with what disastrous result you already know.

"But, lad, your father is alive and well. You may be sure of that, and the next thing is to send him word about yourself. I know we could telephone over to Goodport from here, and have a cablegram forwarded to him; but I want my traps from my cousin's, as I shall now make this my home. So you may drive over to the city to-morrow, if pleasant, and attend to both errands. In less than three days, if the courier from San Juan meets with no mishap, the captain will know you are living. Then we'll write him full particulars, and await his orders."

CHAPTER VII.

A BRAVE ACT.

EARLY the next morning Bert secured a horse and buggy at the nearest stable, and drove over to Goodport. It was a beautiful day, and the lad was in full sympathy with it.

Life and its possibilities had never seemed so great to him. He had, it is true, but a vague idea of his father's plantation; it was hard for him to realize what thousands of acres in a tropical island, with all its richness and variety of crops and fruits, meant; his estimation of his father's wealth might be an exaggeration.

But to have a father; to know that that father was in a position to provide abundantly for him—beyond what any boy's father in all Montville could do perhaps—this gave him a buoyance and ecstasy no words could express. He wanted to sing—to rival the very birds in their morning carols—for who was happier than he?

And he was on the way to send that father a message that would be worth more to him than all his wealth—great as that might be; to tell him that his boy was alive—that he had some one to love him: some one of his own flesh and blood to love. Life would now be so different to him.

In his musings the lad found himself anticipating the reception of that message. How would his father be affected? Would the joy be too great for him? He had heard of instances where sudden joy proved as great a shock as sudden sorrow.

What would his father do? Would he catch the first steamer for America, and hasten to his child? Or cable for his son to join him at once in San Juan? Or by the slower method of communication—writing—make his wishes known? Whichever it was Bert secretly hoped the decision would be for him to join his father rather than that his father should come to him.

He had never been twenty miles from Montville in all his life. Some of his schoolmates had been to Boston; others had been to New York; while one had actually been as far as Washington; and how he had envied them all.

But what if he should go to Porto Rico—and to his father's own plantation there? Not one of his school-fellows had made such a trip, or would be likely to, and he should be the envy of them all.

Bert was human, and as he recalled the slights he had received while in poverty from some who felt that they were socially above him, he could not repress entirely the feelings of exultation that would arise as he recalled his sudden good fortune.

But he was not a vain boy, and had too much good sense to entertain any idea of lording it over his fellows, or to allow his sudden uplift in worldly prospects to make any real difference in his treatment of others.

He reached Goodport an hour before noon; drove up to the best hotel; ordered his horse carefully groomed and fed; and booked his name for dinner.

Then he went to the telegraph office, and sent the message Mr. Barnes had given him:

"Goodport, May 19th, 1897.

"To Captain Albert Larkin,

"Care of Marinos, Tempero, and Vadenti,

"San Juan, Porto Rico.

"Boy is alive and well. Full explanation by next mail. "Barnes."

This pleasant duty discharged, he walked leisurely about the streets of the city. He had been there but once before, and there was much in its busy life to attract his attention.

First he went down to the docks, and looked at the shipping. A large steamer was leaving the harbor, and he tried to imagine himself a passenger on her deck, sailing for the far-off island where his father was.

Slowly retracing his steps, he turned into a side street, that led him to the railroad tracks. As he approached the crossing, he saw that a train was coming, and stopped to let it pass before venturing over.

But his own caution was not exercised by a lady and gentleman, and young miss, of perhaps twelve years, who were just in front of him.

"I believe that is our train," the man said; "we must hurry," and though the warning bells were already tinkling, and the street guards were dropping into their place, he started to run across the track ahead of the train, followed by his wife and daughter.

Bert watched them anxiously, for the swiftly moving train was coming alarmingly near. The gentleman and lady reached the farther side of the crossing in safety, but as they did so, there came a piercing scream from the young girl.

In an instant the lad saw what had happened. Her foot had in some way caught between the rail and the planking of the crossing, and she was unable to remove it.

Her unfortunate predicament was discovered by her parents at the same moment, and the mother sent up the heart-rending cry:

"Ella! Ella! she will be killed!"

The father dropped the valise he was carrying, and started to his daughter's assistance; but the

next minute his wife fell in a dead faint at his feet, and his attention was for the time distracted from the peril his daughter was in—a distraction that would have been fatal to the young girl had not another sprung to her help.

That other was Bert. The moment he realized her danger, he had darted under the guarding-bars, and run to her side. Catching hold of her ankle, he gave the wedged foot a vigorous pull, but it did not move.

He glanced up at the whistling engine, more to judge how much time was left him than with any thought of his own peril. It was not fifty feet away.

As he glanced he did the only thing to be done, and what perhaps but few would have thought of—unbuttoned the girl's shoe, gave the limb a quick jerk, and with the girl in his arms jumped backwards off the track.

So close was the engine that the father, who had left the fainting mother, and hurried to assist the young stranger, thought both were ground beneath its wheels. And so thought the crowd that had gathered in the street just beyond the crossing. But when the train had rushed by, there stood the young lad, holding the pale and trembling girl in his arms, both unhurt.

The father grasped the young rescuer's hand without a word, and then, with the help of the bystanders, both mother and daughter were carried to the waiting-room of the depot, but a few rods away.

There restoratives were applied to the unconscious lady, and soon she was able to clasp her daughter in warm embrace, and assure herself that she had escaped all injury. As was natural under the circumstances, however, both women for a while were somewhat hysterical; but at length calmed down enough for the gentleman to say to them:

"We have lost our train, but there will be an-

other within an hour; so it will not make much difference."

"I wish you had thought of that before; we might have been saved this terrible ordeal," retorted his wife, more sharply than necessary, the waiting boy could not help thinking.

"Let us be thankful it was no worse, mama," said the girl, smiling gratefully at Bert. Then, evidently to turn the attention of her parents from the unfortunate experience of the morning, she added almost gaily:

"What am I to do? I have but one shoe."

"Here's your other one, miss," remarked a man in the crowd that was still gathered about the trio; "but I guess you will never wear it again;" and as he spoke he passed the tiny boot to her father. It had been cut nearly in two by the flanges off the passing wheels.

"I can go and get you another pair, if you wish, Miss Ella; there'll be plenty of time," Bert proposed, and then blushed at his own audacity.

"I wish you would," her father responded, promptly. "Here is a five-dollar bill," taking his wallet from his pocket. "What size is it you wear, Ella?"

"Ones, B width, Misses' size," she answered, coloring in her turn a little, as she met Bert's admiring gaze.

The boy took the money, and hastened off up the street. He had noticed a shoe store on a corner of the main thoroughfare of the city, while on the way to the wharves an hour before.

Hurrying there, he selected a dainty pair of shoes of the required size, paying three dollars for them, and went back to the depot.

The gentleman had gone to check his grip, and procure his tickets, so the lad, unhindered by the mother, removed the remaining shoe from the girl's foot, and buttoned on the new pair.

"They fit splendidly," she declared as Bert finished his self-imposed task.

The father at that moment returned.

"Here is your change, sir," the lad said immediately, handing the gentleman the two-dollar bill. "I paid three dollars for the shoes."

"Why don't you give the money to the boy?" the wife interposed, as her husband took the bill and returned it to his pocket. "I'm sure he deserves it."

"Because he has rendered us a service that cannot be paid in dollars and cents," he replied warmly. Then to Bert he said:

"Pardon me! In our excitement we have not thought to thank you for as heroic a deed as was ever done, or even to ask your name!"

"Bert Larkin," the young hero answered.

"Do you live in the city?"

"No, sir; over at Montville, eighteen miles from here. I came over to the city an hour ago on business, and happened to be at the crossing at the time of your daughter's accident," the lad explained.

He wanted to ask that daughter's full name, and where she lived, whether in the city or not, but hardly dared to do so. While he was wondering if there was any way in which he could ascertain these —to him all-important—facts without a direct question, the next train was announced.

At once the gentleman turned to Bert, saying: "Here is my card. You will hear from me again; and we shall expect you, whenever you come to the city, to call upon us. Remember, moreover, if I can ever be of any service to you, you have but to command me."

Before Bert could look at the tiny piece of cardboard, the young girl caught his hand:

"You are the bravest boy in the world," she said, impulsively; "and I shall never forget you," then she followed her father and mother to the train.

Bert gazed after them until they were in the car; then he caught sight of the mutilated shoe. Picking it up his first thought was to board the train, and give it to the girl, but he quickly changed his mind.

"No, I'll keep it," he said. Then he glanced at the card he still held in his hand. It read:

JOHN H. GREENE
ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR-AT-LAW.
WHITLOW BLOCK, ROOM 4, GOODPORT.
Residence, 175 Carey Avenue.

"So her name is Ella Greene," he murmured. "I wonder if I shall ever see her again. Of course I shall," he added after a moment's thought. "Her father said I was to call when I came over here again, and I will."

With that resolve he put the card carefully into his vest pocket, and went out of the depot, and up the street towards his hotel, with no idea of the great service Mr. Greene would be able to render him before many months had passed; and at a time, too, when he was in sore need.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONTEMPTIBLE TRICK.

At two o'clock Bert had his horse brought around to the hotel door, and began his drive out to the old homestead of Mr. Barnes. Mr. Garrison, the present proprietor, was at home when he arrived there, and to him the lad introduced himself.

"I am Bert Larkin, from Montville," he said. "Mr. Barnes, your cousin, has sent me over here for his baggage."

"So Cousin Jack wants his traps, does he? How is he? Is he going to stay over at Montville any length of time? Didn't hint at such a thing when he went away, and we looked for him to be back long before this," remarked the farmer, looking at the boy over his glasses.

Briefly Bert told of the accident that had befallen the sailor.

"Of all things! I want to know if he was fool enough to coast down Sugar Loaf hill on his wheel?" Mr. Garrison exclaimed when the lad was done. "And he's stopping at your aunt's? Is that the Miss Wheeler he went over there to see? And are you the son of Captain Larkin, whom he hoped to find?"

"Yes, sir," assented the boy, shortly.

"Then he hasn't been to my daughter's at all yet? I told him he better put up there, though he thought he should go to the village hotel. May be you know my gal? She's the wife of Thompson,

who keeps a grocery. Likely as not, though, she has heard of the accident, and been to see her cousin before now," the man rattled on.

"I know Thompson, and think he and his wife know of Mr. Barnes' misfortune; but they haven't called on him yet," replied Bert, curtly. He was greatly surprised to learn that the man whom he had helped was a relative by marriage of the merchant who had discharged him for rendering that assistance.

"Then I must write her, and she'll call right away. We think lots of Cousin Jack," he went on, with a significant wink of his left eye. "Not a child or chick in the world, and has a pile of money to leave somebody one of these days. Might as well be us as any one, you know. Sure he'll get well of this hurt, ain't ye?"

He was satisfied with the boy's "Oh, yes!" and turned and went into the house. In five minutes he reappeared, bringing two sailor's bags, apparently stuffed to their fullest capacity. These he put into the front of the buggy, saying:

"That's all the luggage I know of. Tell Jack I'll come over to see him as soon as I've done planting," and he watched the lad until he had driven out of sight.

"I don't like it that Jack is at that old maid's," he then soliloquized. "She is sort of related to that Captain Larkin, and has been a second mother to this boy. 'Twould be just like a sailor to fall in love with and marry the woman. I'll write Sarah (his daughter) to hurry up and move him over to her house, out of all the danger there may be in that direction. We can't afford to lose any reasonable show for his money."

Five miles out from Goodport there was a road which, leaving the turnpike, wound among the neighboring hills, and around by Hammersley Lake.

Then, skirting that beautiful sheet of water, it re-entered the main highway at the foot of Sugar Loaf hill, as we have had occasion to notice in a previous chapter.

It was a much longer route than that of the turnpike, and a more romantic one. But time or distance made little difference to Bert that afternoon, so, on reaching this road, he turned into it, and drove slowly along its circuitous path towards his destination.

It was perhaps half-past five when he reached the head of the lake, three miles out of the village. Then he pulled up his horse.

"I wonder if I can find any Mayflowers over in Narrow Glen," he said aloud; "if so, I'll take some home to Aunt Mary."

He jumped out, hitched his horse to an adjacent tree, and started down through the woods towards the glen, a quarter of a mile distant.

In about half an hour he returned with both hands full of the delicate and sweet-scented flowers he had been seeking. As he came in sight of his conveyance, however, he saw something that led him to drop the beautiful blossoms he had taken such trouble to obtain, and dash off towards the road at the top of his speed.

He reached the highway to find the two bags and the mutilated shoe (for some reason that it would have been hard for the lad to explain, the latter was of more value to him than the luggage) lying on the ground near where his horse had been hitched, but the animal and wagon were moving rapidly off towards the distant town.

Two boys, Sam Thompson and Bill Ecclestone, who evidently had been fishing at the lake, were now seated in the buggy. The former held the reins, and as he whipped up the horse he called out, tauntingly:

"This pays up for last Saturday, Bert Larkin! We had to walk then, and you can walk now. We don't allow a fellow like you to have all the ease and style when we can prevent it. So long," and a moment later the rascally pair disappeared around a bend in the road.

Between the lake and the Martin farm there were only a few houses, and these were for the most part small affairs, occupied by foreigners, who were employed as woodchoppers in the adjoining forests.

Bert knew it would be impossible to secure a horse and wagon from any of them for the rest of his journey; nor did he think it prudent to entrust Mr. Barnes' baggage to the care of any of them until he could return for it. He did, therefore, the only thing to be done under the circumstances—shouldered the bags, and began his long tramp to the village.

When opposite the laneway that led into the Martin homestead he was at first inclined to go in there and leave the bags with the farmer until the next day. But on second thought he decided to carry them on home.

"It will be dark before I reach the cottage," he said to himself, "and maybe I can so manage that no one will suspect the contemptible trick those boys have played on me."

Before he reached the house his plan to conceal, so far as possible, the loss of his horse and wagon was matured. Dropping his load over the cottage fence, where it could safely lie until he returned, he went around to the stable. Assuming a confidence he did not altogether feel, he asked in a matter-of fact way:

"Those boys left the horse here all right, Mr. Brown, didn't they?"

To his relief the livery-man promptly replied:

"Yes, all right—and more than an hour ago. They said you'd call and pay for it."

So he was able to settle for the use of the team without having the owner suspect the real circumstances of the case.

"There, the worst is safely over," he thought in secret exultation, as he hurried back towards the cottage. "I can walk into the house with those bags on my shoulder and Aunt Mary and Mr. Barnes will think I have only brought them in from the street."

But he was mistaken. Miss Wheeler had been up town that afternoon, and seeing the two culprits as they drove into the village, recognized the horse and buggy as those Bert had hired.

She had no suspicion of the truth, however, but thought possibly Bert was already home, and the team was now being used on some errand for its owner by the lads who were driving it.

On arriving at the cottage, and finding her nephew had not returned, she became somewhat alarmed, and waited his coming with anxiety.

As he came in tugging the sailor's luggage, she at a glance took in his heated and dusty appearance and asked in tones loud enough to reach Mr. Barnes' ears:

"What in the world, Bert Larkin, have you been doing? How came you to let Sam Thompson and Bill Ecclestone have your horse, while you tramped home, and brought this load too?"

There was no escape now. The story had to be told, and when he had finished, his aunt freed her mind.

"No one but a Thompson would do such a mean trick as that! You can make up your mind Sam was the leader of it! It is right on a par with his father's meanness in discharging you for helping Mr. Barnes!"

The patient, through the open doors, heard every word of this conversation, and calling the woman and lad to his bedside, insisted upon being told the whole truth about the Thompsons, both father and son.

Miss Wheeler, who knew nothing of her guest's connection with the Thompson family, related both stories, now so familiar to our readers, with comments that were anything but creditable to the principal in each, notwithstanding Bert's persistent efforts to check her.

"And that's the kind of man Cousin Sarah married, is it?" questioned the sailor when she had completed her tale, and there was evident disgust in his tones.

The cat was out of the bag now, and there was no use in trying to catch him. But Miss Wheeler understood why her nephew had tried to silence her; she was not the woman to eat her own words, however, without just cause.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Barnes," she remarked grimly. "It is awful to feel you are connected with such a family; but what I've said is true, and I sha'n't change it."

"No apology is necessary, ma'am," interposed the sick man. "Mrs. Thompson is my cousin's daughter over at Goodport, and he wanted me to stop with them while I was looking you up. But heaven knows I'd rather be here with a broken limb than stay with such people. For the first time I see how fortunate my accident was. Good lordy! discharge a clerk for trying to be kind to a fellow-creature, or for taking the time to be? It's enough to make a minister say swear-words, now, isn't it?"

"I think he'd stand a chance of being forgiven before Thompson would," was Miss Wheeler's last fling, as she went off to the kitchen to get Bert some supper.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BARNES HAS A VISITOR.

While Bert was eating, his aunt busied herself in unpacking Mr. Barnes' luggage, and placing the articles in the bedroom closet. When she came to the second bag she found a girl's shoe, horribly mutilated, tied to its handle. Loosening it from the cord, she held it out towards the sailor, asking with some curiosity :

"What is this?"

"I'm sure, ma'am, I don't know," the invalid answered, as puzzled as she; "I never saw it before."

Bert was, therefore, called on for another explanation, and when his thrilling adventure had been modestly told, Mr. Barnes remarked in evident admiration :

"Like father, like son. Blood will tell now, won't it? I must add this to the report I have already prepared to send the captain. And that makes me think, Bert. I wish you would write a note to go along with it. Your father would be pleased, I know, to have a letter from you."

"I have already written one," the lad admitted. "I'll get it, and you can read it, if you wish."

While Mr. Barnes is perusing it, we will take the liberty of looking over his shoulder. As he cannot see us, I do not believe he will object :

"Montville, May 18, 1897.

"My own dear Father,

"I have just heard Aunt Mary's and Mr. Barnes' stories, telling me all about you. I can now under-

stand why it is that you have remained unseen and unknown all these years—why we have been unseen by and unknown to each other. And I want to write this, that I may tell you that already I love you with all my heart. The fact is, father, we shall have to love each other a great deal to make up for these years during which we have not known each other, and so could not express our love.

"I shall not write a long letter this time, father, but I have two requests to make of you; and as they are the very first things I have asked of you, and seem to me reasonable, I hope you will grant them.

"First, I want you to forgive Aunt Mary for the wrong she has done you as freely as I do. No mother could have done more for her own child than she has done for me, and she now confesses her wrong, and is sorry for it. Then, father, you and I are too happy, now that we have found each other, to cherish any resentment against any one. So please write us that you forgive Aunt Mary, and shall love her the same as before.

"The second thing I wish to ask is this: May I not come out to Porto Rico with Mr. Barnes, and stay with you at The Anvil until another spring? I will then return to the States, and go to any school you may select. But I want to be with you for a few months, to see your home, and learn to know you as other boys know their fathers. So please do write: 'Come.'

"Your own boy,
"BERT."

"I guess, lad, you'll get both of your requests fast enough," the sailor said, huskily, when he had finished reading the letter. "I know the captain as few know him, and that note will go right to his heart. Here, put it into that envelope on the stand, and seal it up. You can mail it the first time you

go up town, and then we'll wait the captain's orders."

The next morning after breakfast Mr. Barnes called Bert to him, saying :

" I'm so sure you will be sent for, my lad. I think you better learn Spanish. You'll need to know it when on the island ; and then it will give me something to do while I'm lying here. Your father and I have been so long among the Spaniards we speak their language almost as well as the natives themselves."

" I shall be more than glad to learn it?" Bert replied, heartily. " What books shall I get ?"

" Not a single one, youngster," the sick man answered. " I'm going to teach it to you just as you would pick it up among the Islanders. All you need is a piece of paper and a pencil."

Mr. Barnes, as already noticed, had received a good education in his earlier years, and at one time taught school. Years of a seafaring life had rendered him careless in his grammar, and sprinkled his vocabulary with many nautical expressions ; but he soon proved that he possessed an excellent knowledge of Spanish, and knew how to impart it to another.

Beginning with the names of familiar objects, he soon led his pupil to the phrases and sentences he would be most likely to need in ordinary conversation. Bert made surprising progress through the weeks that followed, and it was not long before scholar and teacher were talking together in what Miss Wheeler termed " the most outlandish lingo she ever heard."

But this is anticipation. We must go back to the Saturday morning after Bert's trip over to Goodport, and just a week later than Mr. Barnes' accident, when two important incidents happened.

The first was the reception of a cablegram, telephoned over from Goodport. It read :

"San Juan, Porto Rico, May 21, 1897.

"Barnes:

"Message received. Praise the Lord! Will await your letter, then send you next orders. Give my heart's best love to my boy.

"Larkin."

The second event was a caller for Mr. Barnes, in the person of Mrs. Thompson, the wife of the groceryman.

She drove to the door in a hack, that was evidently stuffed with pillows and blankets, and tripping airily up to the front door of the little cottage, rapped the iron knocker noisily. Miss Wheeler soon appeared, greeting the visitor courteously.

"Good morning, Miss Wheeler," the caller said, with an attempt to be dignified and reserved. "My cousin, Mr. John Barnes, is here, I believe. I would like to see him."

"Certainly, Mrs Thompson; take a seat in the parlor, while I announce your coming."

"Oh, that isn't necessary at all," retorted the merchant's wife, haughtily. "Cousin Jack will be delighted to see me, and I've come to take him home with me. I'll go right to his room," and she brushed by her hostess into the sitting-room, and on into the bedroom where the injured man was.

"Oh! dear Cousin Jack," she cried, rushing up to his bedside and throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him effusively. "I'm so sorry for your accident, and as soon as pa wrote me about it, I came right down here. My carriage is at the door, and I'll take you out from these miserable surroundings to a place where you'll have light and air and good nursing."

"I'm very comfortable where I am, ma'am," her relative said as soon as she had released him from her embrace.

"But pa informed me it was your intention to visit with us, while you attended to a few matters of business in the town; and I'm sure this is no suitable place for you—where there is only a maiden lady and small boy to care for you. I have brought crutches and pillows, and will call my driver, who can assist you to the carriage; I'm sure you will go to my home very comfortably."

"Are you a fool, Sarah?" blurted out the old sailor, with rising indignation. "Don't you know my leg is broken, and I can't be moved for weeks yet? Then I'd like to know why this isn't a proper place for me. I'll have you understand that Captain Larkin's people are just as good as the Garrisons or Thompsons ever were. There's one thing the captain never was known to do, and that is to discharge one of his hands—and he's got a thousand of them—for helping a poor injured mortal. And I never heard of his boy's stealing a horse either, as your youngster has. Then when it comes to money, Captain Larkin can buy out all the Garrisons and Thompsons ever had, with one year's income, and not miss it. You haven't the sense you were born with, Sarah, and that wasn't enough to brag of."

Now Mrs. Thompson had come on this visit hoping her cousin had not heard of her husband's act, though she knew it was the talk of the whole town; but in case he did know of it and made any allusion to it, she was prepared to admit it was a mistake, growing out of her husband's hasty temper, and one of which he had himself repented. In proof of which she could cite his offer on the previous Monday to give Bert his old position in the store.

But the sailor's allusion to her son as a thief startled her. She was aware that Sam was headstrong and unmanageable, but that he would steal she was not so sure. She felt, therefore, she must

be on firmer ground before she committed herself, and quickly decided that to plead an entire ignorance of both her husband's and son's acts would be the best policy. So, assuming an injured air, she said:

"I don't know what you mean, Cousin Jack."

"Then I'll tell you," he responded, warmly; and in a direct and vigorous way he recounted the story of Bert's discharge, and of Sam's running off with the horse and buggy at Lake Hammersley.

Relieved to find that her son's act was nothing more serious, and secretly glad of the discomfiture to which Bert had been put, she remarked:

"La, Cousin Jack, that was only one of Sam's jokes. He meant no harm by it. And if, as you say, my husband discharged young Larkin from the store for helping you, I confess he was too hasty. But likely as not there was some other reason for his act, and he has preferred to bear the blame rather than tell the true ground of dismissing the boy, and so injuring him for life." There was an insinuation in her tones that nettled the invalid more than anything she had yet said.

"Humph!" he ejaculated, wondering whether his visitor was lying, or had herself been deceived. "Humph! That's neither here nor there. I'm going to stay right here till I'm well enough to return to Porto Rico. So we'll let the matter drop."

"But you'll come to see us, as soon as you can walk around, won't you, Cousin Jack? I'm sure you won't entirely desert your own flesh and blood for strangers, because of one or two little mistakes they may have made. None of us, you know, are perfect!" and she was smiling very sweetly now.

"If I make no promises, I sha'n't break them," answered Mr. Barnes, testily. "When any one steps on any of Captain Albert Larkin's folks, they step on me. And when a man would allow a fellow-

creature to lie helpless beside the road, and not aid him, he hasn't got much humanity in him, according to my way of thinking. He's worse than some Spaniards that I know of," and he turned his face to the wall as a hint for his visitor to depart.

When Mrs. Thompson returned to her carriage she was a disappointed woman. Her father's letter had reached her the evening before, telling her who the injured stranger at the vine-clad cottage was, laying great stress upon his supposed wealth, and urging her to do all she could to keep the sailor from falling into the clutches of a designing woman.

Immediately Mrs. Thompson built her own air-castles, in which her son Sam played the chief part as the favorite and possible heir of the rich cousin. Confidently she had gone forth with the expectation of bringing the injured man home with her, or at least securing the promise from him to come to her house as soon as it would be safe for him to undertake the journey. But his emphatic denunciation of her husband and son dashed every hope to the ground.

It was in a spirit of bitterness, therefore, that she met those two members of her family at the supper table.

Describing her visit, and repeating the sailor's strong language, she added :

"A precious pair you are ! One of you, through his innate meanness, has not only gotten the ill-will of the entire community, but lost trade enough to ruin us ; while the other, through his innate love of mischief, has lost the chance of a fortune. I'm disgusted with both of you, and hope I shall never see your faces again," and she flounced out of the room.

She was angry, and in no sense meant what she said, but her last declaration came very near being true of one of her hearers.

CHAPTER X.

A MIDNIGHT ALARM.

The watchman at the Montville Woolen Mills was making his usual midnight round of the buildings under his care. As he turned the corner of the office to cross the yard to the engine house a sudden glare over on the west side of the village caught his attention.

He stopped to watch it, and against the dark clouds which hung low down from the sky he now saw reflected one, two, three, a half dozen streams of light.

"It's a fire, and right over towards Boss Loomis' too. I must give the alarm," he muttered.

A minute later the steam-whistle in the engine room was sending forth a long, piercing, almost unearthly, shriek.

It aroused the neighboring sleepers; men half awake leaped from their beds, and looked out of the nearest windows. Every one who had a western aspect saw the glare, and throwing up the sash, put out his head, and screamed:

"Fire! fire!"

The sextons of the churches rushed to the towers of the sacred edifices under their care, and soon the clang of bells mingled with the shrieks of the steam whistle. In ten minutes the whole town was aroused.

Fire! fire! Clang! clang! Shriek! shriek! Then steps hurry along the streets. With a shout

and a clatter and a tinkling of bells the old fire engine—the only one in the village, and a sorry affair, comes rushing down the main avenue.

Where is the fire? Many, finding it is some distance from their homes, forget that it is near the homes of others, and return selfishly to their beds. Others, finding it alarmingly near, hurriedly dress, and prepare to carry their valuables to a place of safety. One family awake, and are terrified to find the crackling flames above their own heads. It is Thompson's, the groceryman.

Bareheaded, scantily dressed, he and his wife escaped to the street; the servant girl is there before them; for the moment Sam, the other inmate of the house, is forgotten.

Now the engine arrives; a wild, shouting, crowd fills the yard; the suction hose is dropped into the well; the handles are manned: the hose-pipe is run forward, its brass nozzle turned towards the roaring fire; the order is shouted back:

"Give way!"

The handles rise and fall; the hose-pipe fills, and creeps and squirms like a gigantic snake. Then out bursts a stream of water from the nozzle, rises high in the air, and hisses upon the flames.

Two minutes the work continues, then some one, ruuning across the yard, thoughtlessly steps upon the hose. There is a report like a pistol. The pipe has burst, and the unfortunate and unintentional culprit is drenched in the gushing water, while the stream playing on the fire suddenly ceases. There is no spare hose; the work of the engine is over for the night.

"It's no use," says the foreman, examining the break. "It will take an hour to mend that hole; the house is doomed."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Thompson," he reports a moment later to the merchant, who is rushing frantically

here and there, almost insane from the sudden calamity that has come upon him; "but we can do nothing to save your house."

What reply the groceryman would have made was silenced forever by a woman's shriek.

It was Mrs. Thompson. Taken to a neighbor's, after her escape from the building, and furnished with clothing, she had now returned to the scene of the disaster.

Glancing into every face as she came, she reached her husband's side just as the captain of the firemen addressed him.

"Sam!" she gasped. "Where's Sam? Have you seen anything of him?"

"My God!" the father exclaimed, starting back with a look of horror on his face. "He's still in the house!"

"And I shall never see him again," screamed the unhappy mother, tearing her hair. "Those were my last words to him last night: 'I wish never to see your face again,' and it's come true. But I didn't mean it. Save my boy! Will some one save my boy!"

A hundred eyes turned and looked towards the burning building. The whole front was in flames, the roof was one solid blaze; it was as much as one's life was worth to venture in there.

Yet one person evidently intended to make the trial, for a quiet voice asked:

"Where is his room?"

"At the head of the back stairs, next to the ell," Mr. Thompson hurriedly answered, turning to see who it was that had asked the question.

But already the speaker was pushing his way through the crowd towards the rear of the house, and he could not tell who he was.

The throng surged in the same direction, and were in time to see a youth dash through the flames that

already roared above the back door, and disappear on the stairway that led up from the entry. As he went the light of the fire revealed his identity. Instantly there was a shout:

"Bert Larkin! It's Bert Larkin!"

It was indeed our young hero. Coming from the extreme south part of the village, he had reached the scene of the fire just in time to hear the mother's heart-rending exclamations. Immediately asking in which part of the house Sam slept, he, on hearing the father's reply, determined to rescue the imperiled lad, and before any one could remonstrate was within the doomed building.

Fortunately the rear of the cottage was the freest from the flames, and when once up the stairway, Bert found himself able to make his way along the narrow hallway, which separated the ell from the main body of the house to the door of Sam's room. It was open; dense smoke filled the chamber; and the flames were bursting through the side walls.

Almost suffocated the brave lad groped his way over to the bed; there lay young Thompson, unconscious; while already the fire was curling slowly around the head-board, singeing his hair, and blistering his face. To all appearances he was dead.

Snatching the still form from the couch, Bert dragged it across the room and to the hallway. There he stumbled and fell from exhaustion; yet that fall was his own salvation, and that of the lad whom he was rescuing.

Directly across the narrow hallway was a door leading into the ell. As Bert plunged forward his head struck this door, and giving way, it let him into a room comparatively free from smoke.

It filled rapidly from the hallway and adjacent rooms, it is true; but the brief breath of fresh air the lad got revived him, and rising to his feet, he drew his burden to the only window in the low

chamber, at its extreme end, and as yet untouched by the fire.

In an instant the boy tore the sashes out, threw open the closed blinds, and called to the crowd below:

"Help! Take this body!"

It was not over twelve feet to the ground, and in a moment four stalwart men caught the unconscious form, and bore it to the street, while Bert, lowering himself full length out of the opening, held for a second, and then dropped to the ground, unhurt.

Dr. Russell was in the throng of bystanders, and, as the four men reached the feet of the agonized parents with their limp burden, he stooped down and placed his hand over the boy's heart.

"He lives!" he immediately announced. "Move back all of you and give the lad air. Some one bring me water. Here, Thompson, you and your wife chafe his limbs, rubbing upwards towards the heart. It was a close shave, as that singed hair shows, but we shall save him yet."

As for the physician himself he was already hard at work. Tearing away the boy's night shirt and under garment, he freely exposed the throat and chest. Then he turned his patient on to his side and by gentle movements back and forth endeavored to start the respiration.

A slight movement of the pallid lips a moment later attracted his keen attention, and drawing a small case from a side pocket, he took out a vial, and placed a few drops of its contents between the parting lips.

There was a gasp, an effort to swallow that ended in success, and the eyes of the lad opened.

"What's the matter?" he asked faintly.

"Here, that water," the doctor called to a man who a moment before had run up with a pitcher of the precious fluid.

Pouring some into his hand the physician bathed the boy's temples and forehead, and wet the parched lips, saying gently :

"You'll be all right soon, Sam; then we'll tell you all about it."

The lad seemed satisfied, and closed his eyes, but his breath came regularly.

Watching him a few minutes, Dr. Russell said :

"The only thing now is to make him comfortable. Where can we take him?"

"Right into my house," answered Mr. Loomis, who lived but two doors away. "And, Thompson, you and your wife come too, and stay with us until you can make your arrangements for a new home. We have, as you know, plenty of room."

This invitation was accepted and the rescued lad, followed by his parents, was carried to the kind and thoughtful neighbor's.

Absorbed in the care of their child they gave no thought to his brave rescuer. But not so with the crowd of onlookers. As the merchant and his family disappeared, a dozen tongues began to ask :

"Bert Larkin! Where is he? Was he hurt? Find him!"

Bert, however, though a silent and unnoticed witness of the efforts made to restore Sam, had now slipped quietly away, and could not be found.

CHAPTER XI.

BERT'S TWO PRESENTS.

In the excitement attendant upon the Thompson fire, and the sympathy naturally extended to the unfortunate family, Bert's heroic act was not forgotten. Nor did the lad's magnanimity in contrast with the narrow and selfish spirit exhibited by the merchant pass unnoticed.

Singular, too, as it may seem, Bill Ecclestone was among the first to notice this contrast, and to speak of it. Meeting Ned Loomis a few hours after the fire, he asked:

"How's Sam?"

"Resting nicely," was the reply. "The doctor thinks he'll be up and around to-morrow as usual."

"Mighty close shave for him, though."

"Yes," admitted young Loomis; "and lucky for him too that Bert Larkin reached there just in time. Who else would have dared rescue him?"

"I say, Ned," Ecclestone suddenly questioned, looking about him to see if any one else was near enough to hear, "has Bert ever told you the mean trick Sam and I played on him last week?"

"No; what was it?"

With some hesitation the boy told how Sam and he had run off with young Larkin's horse, leaving him to walk home with his heavy load. He concluded:

"I don't know what Sam will do when he gets

out, but I'm ashamed of my part in the affair, and am going to tell Bert so the first time I see him."

"I'd go and tell him now," suggested Ned; then he added warmly:

"I tell you there are few fellows like Bert Larkin! I don't believe he stopped a single moment to think how Sam and his father had used him, when he learned of Sam's danger, but just went right ahead and rescued him as though he was the best friend he had in all the world."

"Of course he did," assented Bill, "and I've played the last mean trick on him I ever shall; or on any one else, I guess," and stirred by the noblest motives of all his life the lad went off to find Bert and acknowledge his wrong.

Ned, in his sincere admiration for his friend Bert, did not hesitate to tell of Bill's confession, and before night the whole town knew and were discussing young Larkin's heroism in the light cast upon it by the contemptible acts of both Thompsons, the father and son.

They were in a measure prepared, therefore, for the position taken by the local paper, published a little later in the week. Describing in minute detail the rescue of young Thompson, it, with the same charming frankness, told of the rescuer's summary discharge from the grocery a week before, and the reason for it. It also printed a full account of the dastardly trick Sam Thompson and Bill Ecclestone had played upon young Larkin only three days before the fire.

Nor was this all. In another column, with glaring head-lines, it reprinted from *The Goodport News* a thrilling account of Bert's brave act in saving Ella Greene from the wheels of the passing train:

Then it had the following editorial:

"Seldom is it given to so young a lad, in a single

week, to reveal so much of his real character as Albert Larkin, Jr., of this village. On Saturday, May 15th, as noted in our last issue, he showed that he possessed the spirit and love of the Good Samaritan by helping John Barnes, the unfortunate sailor, who was injured at Martin's Brook, near Sugar Loaf hill. On Wednesday, the 19th, as a glance at another column (in which we reprint an article from *The Goodport News*) will show, he, while in that city, bravely rescued the little daughter of Hon. John T. Greene from a passing train. Then on Saturday night, the 22d, or to be more accurate, early Sunday morning, the 23d, he, with a magnanimity seldom paralleled, risked his life to save a lad, who, but a few days before, had played a most despicable trick upon him—the son of the very merchant who had within a week unjustly discharged him.

Such heroism and magnanimity surely deserve some substantial recognition on the part of our town's people. *The Journal* suggests a handsome gold watch, suitably engraved, as a fitting testimonial, and starts the subscription with a gift of ten dollars. All other subscriptions will be received at this office, and duly acknowledged in our columns."

Before the next issue of *The Journal*, however, enough money had been subscribed to purchase a costly time-piece, and this was sent to Bert on June 10th, his sixteenth birthday.

Mr. Barnes looked over the list of donors, and then throwing down the paper with a show of disgust, exclaimed :

" Do you notice, Miss Wheeler, not one of those Thompsons, father, mother, or son, gave a dollar towards the watch ?"

" Yes," was the grim reply, " and you were a fool to expect it. You wouldn't, had you known them as long as I have."

"They lost a good deal by the fire," said Bert, who heard these remarks, apologetically, "and you could hardly expect it of them. "I'm sure, however, they are grateful for all I did for them."

"Did you ever hear them say so?" asked the sailor, sharply.

"No," the lad reluctantly admitted, "that is, not yet."

"Well, they've had time enough," remarked his aunt, dryly; "and so have those other people over at Goodport. Seems to me folks nowadays lack the very first principles of true politeness."

"Or may be they don't value their lives very highly," put in the invalid. "I have heard of a man who gave the fellow that rescued him from drowning a twenty-five-cent piece. Maybe you'll get as much as that for the double risk you ran, Bert."

"I did not try to save either one from any thought of reward," the lad answered somewhat indignantly; "and whether the Thompsons ever thank me for what I did for Sam makes little difference. Mr. Greene and Ella both thanked me for rescuing her, and I know I shall both hear from and see them again."

And he was right; for the very next day he received the following prettily worded invitation from Miss Ella herself:

"Goodport, June 11, 1897.

"Mr. Albert Larkin, Jr.,

"Papa, says I am to write and ask you to spend next week Wednesday, June 16th, with us. We shall expect you in time for dinner, and to remain over night. We all shall be glad to see you.

"Your friend,

"Ella F. Greene."

Of course Bert returned a favorable answer, and

the following Wednesday drove over to Goodport. Putting up his horse at the hotel stable, he inquired the way to 175 Carey Avenue, the Greene residence.

Following closely the directions given him he soon came out upon a broad, handsome street, beautifully shaded with gigantic elms. Along either side were houses that told more of the comfort and refinement to be found within than of any great attempt towards outward show and adornment. By these he slowly passed until he reached the desired number.

It was a pretty cottage, situated back a little from the street, with a well-kept lawn and flower-beds, while twin fountains, one on each side of the flagstone walk, sent forth their cool and sparkling waters.

With some trepidation, it must be confessed, the lad went up the path, and rang the bell. As he waited a clock, somewhere within the house, struck eleven. He counted the strokes, and was just wondering if he was too early, when the door was thrown open, and there stood Ella herself.

"I thought it was you," she said with a pretty blush, catching hold of his extended hand, "and so told Bridget, our girl, I would come to the door. And you see I wasn't disappointed."

"I think you must have known my ring; you are so used to it," replied Bert in fun.

"I did know it," she stoutly affirmed. "It was the same short, quick pull you gave when you freed my foot from that horrid rail. I should know it any time, whether you come often or not."

She now led the lad into the parlor, telling him her mother would be in within a few minutes, and her father before the dinner hour, which was at one.

"I came very early then, didn't I?" said Bert in some dismay.

"Not one moment before you were expected," she answered. "Papa said he would wager me a new pair of gloves that you would walk up to the door just as the clock was striking eleven; but I looked for you before that."

Before the boy could reply a step was heard in the hall, and Mrs. Greene entered.

She greeted the lad with a warmth he had not anticipated from her, and as this had been the one cause of all his dread, he now felt quite at his ease.

"I presume you expected to hear from us before now, Mr. Larkin," she said, when she was seated in a comfortable rocker within the bay window of the room.

"Oh! no, ma'am," he hastened to protest; "I was not sure I should hear from you at all until I called."

"We were summoned to my mother's in Ohio," Mrs. Greene explained. "She was taken critically ill, and it was feared she could not recover. That accounts for our haste in trying to catch the train that day you saved my little daughter, and perhaps, too, for some of my own irritableness that morning."

"I hope your mother is better," said Bert politely.

"Yes, she was out of all danger before we arrived at Cleveland. But we stayed until she was about the house again. In fact we did not arrive home until the tenth, and the next day Ella wrote to you."

"I am sure it was very good of you," Bert answered, addressing the mother, but looking at the daughter as though he meant a portion of his remark for her.

"You are a very brave boy. We've heard something about your bravery since that day, too," responded Mrs. Greene, heartily. But to us nothing can surpass the saving of our child."

"I wish you wouldn't mention it," was the impulsive reply. "I should have been a brute to have stood there and let the train run over Ella. It was nothing more than any one would have done."

"Strange, then, they stood there and allowed you to do it, isn't it?" said a new voice, and Mr. Greene came in.

His greeting was as hearty as his wife's and daughter's had been; and he was soon chatting away with the lad as though they were old friends.

He soon showed, moreover, that he was familiar not only with the lad's history since the memorable Wednesday three weeks before when they had first met, but, and what puzzled Bert more, with his history from childhood.

"I presume you hope to join your father in Porto Rico before long, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; for the winter at least," the boy admitted. Then he inquired: "Did you know my father, sir?"

"No, I never saw him," replied the lawyer; "but I don't want you to think I was so little interested in you as to leave you entirely out of mind for the last three weeks.

"I have had good friends to work for me, even if I was west, and I know all about your tramp from Hammersley Lake; all about a certain fire in Montville; all about a gold watch you have in your pocket, a gift from your townspeople; all about a certain sailor lying disabled in your home, the messenger of your father, who lives on a large plantation under the shadow of the great Anvil Mountain in Porto Rico. We lawyers have a way of getting at things that is mysterious to the uninitiated, haven't we, pet?" and he caught up his daughter in his arms, and pinched her plump cheeks.

She nodded her head wisely:

"Of course we have, papa," she answered; "and

all we have learned about him was good, wasn't it? He's just the best boy in all—in all——" and she stopped, evidently trying to find a comparison large enough to suit her.

"Montville," suggested her father, teasingly.

"Montville!" she cried, indignantly; "he's better than any boy in Goodport, or Cleveland, or the whole world, Papa Greene, and you know it."

"There, Bert, you see what she thinks of you, anyway," said Mr. Greene, putting her down.

Bert glanced at the girl in a way that said as plainly as the words could have done: "And I think just as much of her as she does of me," but he only remarked:

"I am very glad, sir."

Dinner was now announced; and when that was eaten, the lawyer asked:

"How would you like a trip down the harbor this afternoon, Bert?"

"I don't know of anything I should like better, sir," he responded, enthusiastically.

"Then, mother, you and Ella may come down to Dyer's Wharf at half-past two," said the lawyer to his wife, "I'll take Bert down town with me. I've a few friends I wish to introduce him to."

Had Bert been the governor of the state he could not have received any more attention than he did for the next hour. To lawyers, judges, physicians, bankers, and city officials, he was invariably presented:

"This is the lad that so heroically saved my daughter Ella a few weeks ago, Albert Larkin, Jr., son of Captain Albert Larkin of Porto Rico."

In many cases the gentlemen, after acknowledging the introduction, would say:

"We knew your father, sir. He was one of the best captains that ever sailed from this port. Some of the father in the lad, eh, Greene?"

Pleasant as this was the boy was glad when the time was up, and Mr. Greene and he met the ladies at the wharf, and went on board the finest launch he had ever seen.

Then followed an afternoon and evening never to be forgotten. In and out among the islands of the harbor they glided; now slowly to take in the beautiful scenery; then at a speed that rivaled the fleetest horse. At a great hotel away down the bay they took their supper, returning home by moonlight.

"I cannot tell you how much I thank you for this day of pleasure, Mr. Greene," the grateful boy said, as he was about to be shown to his room for the night.

"Ella has something she wants to give you as the crowning pleasure of the day for us all," said the attorney, looking at his daughter. "It is to be opened in your room."

She took a little package her father handed her, and walked over to the lad.

"Whenever you look at this, think of the girl who prays every night for God to bless you," she said, simply.

With a "thank you," Bert followed his host up to the guest-chamber, and when quite alone unwrapt the tiny package.

First, there was a velvet case; inside of this there was a golden locket, studded with gems. Touching its spring, the cases flew open, revealing a face on one side and an inscription on the other.

The face was Ella's. The inscription read:

"*From the girl whose life you saved, May 19th,* 1897."

CHAPTER XII.

OUTWITTED.

By the middle of July Mr. Barnes was able to hobble around on crutches; but before that time letters had been received from Captain Larkin.

The letter to the sailor was a brief one. It thanked him for his faithfulness in carrying out his employer's orders; it contained a draft large enough to reimburse him for whatever sums he had already expended, and to meet all other expenses likely to be incurred; and it expressed a hope that he would be able to sail for Porto Rico by the middle of September, bringing the lad with him.

The letter to Bert was longer, and disclosed the yearning love of the father's heart.

"I should come to you by the outgoing steamer, my dear boy," it read, "were there any one to leave in charge of the plantation. Since this is an impossibility, I have directed Jack to bring you out to me.

"This, and the other request you made, are cheerfully granted. In proof of it, I will add, bring your aunt out to the island with you, if she cares to come; if not, see that some one is secured to be a companion for her during the months you are absent, and that she is provided with every comfort she desires. From this time I shall send her quarterly remittances, and she need have no further anxiety for her financial future.

"I can hardly wait for your coming, my son.

Every day will be a long day until we meet. That I should have a boy, and such a boy as Jack reports you to be, seems too good to be true. I am unworthy of so great a blessing.

"You can hardly anticipate more in the love of a father, than I in the affection of a son; and we will trust that both of us shall be spared many years to enjoy each other's companionship.

"Jack will pay all your necessary expenses, and provide a suitable outfit for your journey and sojourn here. But you will need a little pocket-money of your own, to do as you please with. I therefore enclose your allowance for two months, July and August—a great pleasure, I assure you.

"In deepest love,

"Your father,

"Albert Larkin."

Glancing at the draft, after he had read the letter, Bert saw that it was for two hundred dollars. Calling his aunt's attention to the amount, he remarked, with pardonable pride:

"See, Aunt Mary, that looks as if father meant to give me one hundred dollars a month for my own."

"What in the world will you do with it?" questioned the amazed woman.

"Get me a fast horse, and a yacht, and an eye-glass, and a cane, and a pug dog, like all the other swells, I presume," the boy replied, mischievously.

"Go 'long! You won't do anything of the kind, Bert Larkin. You've too good sense for that."

"I hope so, auntie," the lad responded, seriously. "But I know one thing I am going to use part of the money for, and that is to give Jimmie Hough his sight. You know, Aunt Mary, how his mother worked and saved to get the hundred dollars necessary for the operation which they say will enable the little fellow to see. Then came the sickness

and death of her other child, and she had to take the money she'd saved to pay those expenses. Well, I'm going to give her the hundred dollars, and Jimmy can be sent to the hospital at once."

"What else are you going to do, Bert?" Miss Wheeler asked, with visible emotion.

"Buy a present for Ella Greene," responded the boy, laughing to conceal the flush that swept over his face.

"He's beginning young, now, isn't he, ma'am?" questioned Mr. Barnes, who had so far been only a listener to the conversation. "Pity people couldn't be sensible as you and I have been. Though, perhaps, had you and I met years ago, Miss Wheeler, we'd have been as foolish as any of them." And Bert thought there was more earnestness than jest in the sailor's tones.

"What if he should marry Aunt Mary," he thought; "they are about of an age, and he might do a great deal worse," and he looked at his aunt, waiting with some curiosity to hear what she should say.

She colored considerably at Mr. Barnes' words, but hastily answered:

"What an idea, sir! You are foolish to think of it." Then she arose and left the room to hide her embarrassment.

"I'm not joking, lad," the cripple confessed, as she disappeared. "If we were twenty years younger, or even ten, I wouldn't leave the States without asking her to join fortunes with me. But I'm only an old codger now, unfit for any woman." And lighting his pipe, he relapsed into his former silence.

"'Faint heart never won fair lady,'" quoted Bert, taking up his hat and leaving the house for a walk.

He went towards the village, and soon reached its business street. Passing by the grocery, where only

a short time before he was clerk, he came to the green. Sitting down on one of the benches, under the shade of a huge maple, he meditated upon what was to him a very pleasant subject—the nature of the present he should select for his girl friend over at Goodport.

"Of course I'll give her my picture," he soliloquized, "and I'll go over to the city to have it taken. But I want to give her something else—something that will suggest our first meeting. What shall it be?"

He thought of a dozen things, but none suited his fancy.

"I can visit the stores when over there," he concluded, "and maybe I'll see something that will be just the thing."

This important decision once reached, he was about to rise and continue his walk, when some one called out:

"Hello, Larkin!"

He turned, thinking he recognized the voice, and saw Sam Thompson.

It was the first time they had met since the fire, and wondering what he wanted, Bert waited for him to come up.

"Is that old sailor able to hobble around yet?" he asked, sitting down on the bench.

"If you mean Mr. Barnes, yes," our hero replied, coldly.

"Well, I'll tell ma, and she'll invite him up to dinner some day. We are all settled over in Parker's new house; have new furniture, and everything else in bang-up style. Pa groaned over everything that was bought, but ma would have it, and he had to give in. It puts that cottage of yours in the shade, I tell you. Wish we owned the place, but it's a little too much for dad's pocketbook. Ma says, 'Get old Barnes up there, and maybe we can

coax him to buy it for us.' He's lots of money, and can do it just as well as not.

"I hear you are going out to Porto Rico in the fall, Bert," he rattled on; "and I wish you'd get Cousin Jack to take me along. He can afford it, and you and I'd get on nicely together. What do you say?"

"I might mention it to Mr. Barnes," his companion suggested; but he did not think it wise to add that he already knew what the sailor would say to the proposition.

"That's a good fellow!" Sam exclaimed, patronizingly; "and though I wouldn't tell every one, I'll tell you what we are up to. Ma and me thought out the scheme. Only get Cousin Jack to take me along to the island with him, and likely as not he'll grow so fond of me he'll make me his heir."

"What if he should get married?" suggested Bert, jocosely.

"You don't suppose he will, do you?" asked young Thompson in alarm. "Ma thought of that — that he might fall in love with your aunt, while she was nursing him; that's why she wanted to move him up to our house. But I told her he wouldn't think of marrying any one as old and as poor as your Aunt Mary, and she concluded I was right."

His comrade wisely made no reply; but secretly concluded the very thing the Thompsons feared might happen.

"I've been thinking of another thing—it's a part of the plan," said the chatterer, growing more confidential. "If I can only contrive some way to do Cousin Jack a great favor, as you did when you picked him up by the turnpike, why I'd just win his gratitude. It'll come, too, don't you forget it. I've an idea I shall work out before he's off for Porto Rico.'

"What is it?" asked Bert, innocently.

"It's my secret," replied Thompson, compla-

cently; "not even ma knows of it. But you'll hear of it. The papers will publish it, as they did all those nice things about you; and if the people don't give me a watch, probably Cousin Jack will, he'll be so grateful. See!" and he arose and strutted away down the street, pompously.

As Mr. Barnes grew stronger he began to take walks uptown, and finally got so he went as far as the public square. Sitting sometimes on a bench, and sometimes on the steps of one of the churches that faced the green, he would rest himself before returning home.

One August afternoon he sat resting there. It was warm, and more tired than usual he dropped off into a doze. From this he was rudely awakened by some one snatching his crutches, and he looked around just in time to see an unknown lad making off with the sticks. The boy disappeared around the nearest corner before he could do, or say, anything, and for a few minutes he sat there helpless.

Then another youth came running around the same corner with the crutches in his arms. Hastily approaching the sailor, he offered him his indispensable supports, saying:

"I was just in time, Mr. Barnes, to catch the fellow who stole your sticks, and after a tussle secured them and brought them back to you," and he puffed as though quite out of breath from his efforts.

"Thank ye! thank ye! Here's a dollar for your trouble," said the lame man, taking out his wallet. "I can't see what that young rascal wanted to bother a helpless man like me for. But your kindness does you credit. May I ask your name?"

"Sam Thompson, your cousin's only son," the boy answered, pocketing the bill given him with alacrity.

"Oh!" ejaculated the sailor, looking searchingly at the youngster; but if any suspicion as to the genuineness of the lad's kindness crossed his mind he

did not show it. On the other hand, his next words seemed to indicate a still heartier appreciation of the boy's act.

"I'm glad Cousin Sarah has such a thoughtful son; tell her I told you so," he said.

"Thank you, Cousin Jack," Sam replied, politely; "it's kind of you, I'm sure," but he acted uneasy and as though he was anxious to get away.

"Will you carry this stick for me as far as the street, and let me rest one hand on your shoulder?" Mr. Barnes now asked, smilingly. "I want to see if I can go on one crutch."

Unwittingly Sam fell into the trap his cousin was setting for him.

He took the crutch indicated under his left arm, placed himself so the lame man could put one hand on his right shoulder, and then walked slowly by his side as he hobbled along.

Their course took them near the street corner which Sam had just turned.

"I believe I can go a little farther with your help, Sam," Mr. Barnes remarked, as they reached the street; and they went on to the next crossing.

"I'll get over to the other sidewalk, and then you can give me the other stick," he now said.

This brought them within three feet of the spot towards which the sailor's ruse had been steadily leading them.

"Now the crutch, youngster;" there was a change in Mr. Barnes' tones, but the unsuspecting lad did not notice it, and surrendered the support he was carrying.

The next instant, and with a speed that no one would have thought possible, the cripple whirled around the corner.

He was in time to catch and collar the boy who was standing there, waiting for young Thompson's return.

"Let me go! I meant no harm, sir! Sam said he'd give me a half-dollar to do it, and I was waiting for the money," whined the captured culprit.

Sam, too dazed for a moment by this sudden turn in the affair to run away or to talk, finally blurted out:

"He lies! I never made any bargain with him."

"Strange he should be waiting here, and run the risk of being caught, now isn't it," remarked the sailor, dryly. "Well, you can give him that dollar I gave you."

There was a sternness in Mr. Barnes' voice that admitted of no trifling, and reluctantly Sam surrendered the bill to the other lad.

"That is for your exposure of the real culprit," said the cripple to the boy he still held. Then to young Thompson he added: "Now pay him the half-dollar you promised him; he did his work well, and is entitled to his pay."

Even more reluctantly than he had yielded up the dollar, Sam took two quarters from his pocket and handed them over to his employee.

"You may go, but never get into such a scrape again," advised the sailor, releasing his hold on the lad.

"I won't, sir," promised the boy, running down the street.

Then Mr. Barnes turned his full attention to Sam.

"A pretty little affair, wasn't it?" he asked with withering sarcasm. "Thought you'd play the part of a public benefactor, didn't ye? Wanted to get your name in the papers—to pose as a hero? A nice little scheme, and it's too bad to disappoint you so I'll go around to the news office, and report the matter myself. Good day, sir!" and he was as good as his word. The whole story was given in the next issue of *The Journal* but somehow neither one of the Thompson family was satisfied with it.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALONE ON THE SEA.

It was finally decided that Mr. Barnes and Bert should sail from New York city, September 15th, on the steamer Alhambra, for San Juan.

"I shall be able by that time to walk with only a cane to lean upon, and with your help now and then, lad, can get along nicely," the sailor said.

"I wish Aunt Mary would go along too," the boy remarked, wistfully. "I hate to leave her here."

"Now don't you go to worrying about me," protested Miss Wheeler. "Of course I'm going to miss you awfully; but Sue Braddock is glad of the home, and is coming here to stay while you are gone. As for me, at my time of life, sailing the seas and visiting tropical lands, I just won't do it, and that's the end of it," and no amount of persuasion could change her decision.

About the first of the month both of our prospective travelers visited Goodport for a few days. Mr. Barnes desired to select their outfits for their journey; while Bert was anxious to call again upon his friends on Carey Avenue.

The problem of a gift to Miss Ella was as yet unsettled, and he hoped in the stores of the enterprising city to find its solution; and the intricate question was settled quickly and in an entirely unexpected way.

The lad was passing an art store on the main street, the very day of their arrival in the city,

when his attention was attracted to a picture in one of its windows.

It was a good-sized painting, entitled "The Broken Shoe." The scene was an humble shoemaker's shop, and in the background were the bench and tools of the artisan; while in front stood two figures—a young lad, evidently an apprentice, with apron and turban on; and a young girl, a prospective customer.

In the boy's hand was a shoe, which the girl had just handed to him, and her face asked plainly the question: "Can it be mended?" The youth's face was sober and perplexed, as though he had met with a difficult case.

But there were other and more striking features about the picture which settled the question of its purchase with Bert. The face of the girl bore a marked resemblance to Ella Greene; the face of the lad was a good portrait of himself; while the shoe was broken in almost the identical way and place that Ella's had been cut on that memorable morning in May.

Stepping into the store Bert found the price of the painting was within his means, and purchasing it, he directed that it should be packed, and held subject to his order.

On his last call at the Greene cottage, he said to Ella:

"I saw a picture the other day that reminded me of the circumstances under which we first met, and I've taken the liberty to have it sent up to you. I hope you will be as pleased with it as I was, and that it will help you to keep me in mind during the long months of my absence."

"I don't think I shall have any trouble to remember you," she replied earnestly; "but I know I shall like your gift."

It was hard to part with these friends, and had

not Mr. Barnes been there also, Bert would surely have given way to his emotion. As it was he heroically controlled himself, and only the parting grasp of the hand he gave each member of the family told of the depth of his feeling.

His parting with his Aunt Mary was harder yet. She had been the only mother he had known, and he was not ashamed to shed tears as he bade her good-by.

Mr. Barnes, who had turned his back on this farewell scene, doubtless to hide his own emotion, stopped to have the last word with Miss Wheeler, as the lad, bag in hand, went out to the waiting carriage.

What he said to her only they two ever knew. He was, however, in the best of spirits from that brief interview. He whistled softly to himself the air of an old love-tune during their long ride over to the Flanders station ; and but once broke in on the silence of the boy who sat by his side.

"I tell you, Bert," he remarked suddenly, "when you come back to the States next spring I'm coming with you."

He and the lad both knew that old line of Burns' :

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley."

Yet neither of them imagined the future that was in store for them ; or what was to happen ere they again looked upon the familiar sights and scenes of Montville.

Their journey to New York had been arranged some days before the sailing of their steamer, as the last letter of Captain Larkin had brought Mr. Barnes some extensive orders for machinery and goods to be shipped to the island for use on the plantation.

In the making of these purchases the old sailor found Bert of great assistance, and frequently remarked:

"Why, youngster, when you come back to the States you can act as your father's purchasing agent. You would do well enough, and it would be a mighty big saving on commissions too. I shall tell the captain so."

The goods once purchased, there was ample time for the man and boy to take in the chief sights of the metropolis. Mr. Barnes was as delighted as the lad himself to see these things, and often commented on the growth and changes in the city since he had visited it more than sixteen years before.

But the time of their waiting soon ran out, and on a beautiful afternoon in the fairest of all the fall months, they found themselves standing on the steamer's deck, as she rapidly plowed her way to sea.

For two days the weather was delightful, but as the third morning dawned there was a thick haze in the southeast, and before noon the sky was overcast. The wind also steadily increased, and at dark was blowing a gale.

"It's going to be a nasty night, lad," Mr. Barnes remarked, as after supper Bert helped him to his stateroom; an act that had become necessary from the heavy rolling of the steamer.

Once in his berth he added:

"Fortunately we have a new and staunch vessel under our feet, and it will have to be a regular hurricane that drives her from her course."

"I believe I'll go on deck for a while," Bert said. "It's not yet too rough for me, and I rather enjoy the storm."

"All right," his companion assented. "Guess you have some of the sailor in you, if this is your first voyage. Well, if both of my limbs were as

strong as they once were, I'd go with you. As it is, I reckon I'd better stay here."

Ascending to the deck, Bert found the storm had materially increased in the short time he had been below. Great waves were now dashing over the ship's bow ; the wind blew with a force that made it difficult to keep one's feet ; while the groaning and tossing of the steamer seemed not unlike a great monster screaming and writhing in pain.

Working his way around to the lea of the cabin, the lad took a firm hold on the adjacent rail, and looked about him.

It was too dark to see more than a dozen feet away ; evidently, however, he was the only passenger who had ventured on deck, and officers and crew were too busy to notice him.

There was a fascination for him in the tempest, and he remained there until a sudden gust of the wind brought with it a deluge of water that drenched him from head to feet.

Shaking the water off, he crawled along to the cabin door, and, opening it with difficulty, descended to the saloon.

Hurrying on to his stateroom, he found Mr. Barnes still awake, and, while changing his clothing, told him of his adventure.

His description of the gale, and especially of his impromptu ducking, amused his room-mate greatly.

" I've been through similar experiences hundreds of times, lad, and thought nothing of it. It's the novelty which makes it so fascinating to you. But when you get your dry clothing on, you better turn in, and get what sleep you can. Likely 'twon't be much."

But he was wrong. In ten minutes after the lad crawled into his bunk he was fast asleep, and slept soundly until there came a shock that threw him from his berth clear across the tiny room. Scarcely

had he struck the floor when Mr. Barnes landed on top of him, and it took them some minutes, under the lurching of the craft, to regain their feet.

"We've run ashore somewhere!" exclaimed Bert, holding himself upright by his berth.

"No, it's a collision," answered Mr. Barnes, "and there's serious damage done. "Dress as soon as you can, buckle that life-belt I provided under your armpits. Then help me into the saloon, or possibly out on to the deck."

It was not long before they were ready, and went out into the cabin. All was confusion there. Half-dressed passengers were rushing to and fro; frantic cries filled the room; an officer and two stalwart sailors stood guard at the companion-way; no one was allowed on deck.

Mr. Barnes was cool and collected; and the lad, though his face was a trifle pale, remained calmly by his companion's side.

"My impression is we are sinking," the old seaman said in low tones to the boy. "Let us get over by the gangway, we may find out something from the officer."

It was not an easy thing to push their way through the terrified throng, but they at length succeeded, and Mr. Barnes was able to say to the mate in charge of the passage-way:

"Bad accident, ain't it, Mr. Bellows?"

The man recognized the speaker, and replied quietly:

"We fear it is, Mr. Barnes, and are preparing for the worst. Fortunately morning is close at hand, and there is not as much sea as there was two hours ago."

"Could you make out the other vessel, sir?" was the old sailor's next question.

"Yes, sir; she was a large schooner, heavily laden, and must have been injured worse than we are, for she sank at once."

"You know how it is yourself, sir, in a dense fog," he continued; "we couldn't see ten feet away, and though our lights were up, and we kept the whistle going, the other vessel must have miscalculated our position, and crashed into us without a moment's warning. The heavy sea shook her off, and the wind carried her clear of us before she sank, else she'd have carried us down."

What more he might have said was cut off by an order from the deck.

"Life-boats are ready, Mr. Bellows; pass the women and children up first."

To the credit of the men this command was obeyed without the slightest outbreak.

"Now there, men; don't crowd; there is plenty of time, and plenty of boats," announced the officer in charge.

His words prevented disorder, and soon all were on the deck. It was still very dark, but as rapidly as possible the passengers were lowered into a boat from the lee side of the sinking steamer.

When one boat was full, it was cast off, and another took its place. Officers and crew were under good control, and the work went on rapidly and orderly.

"I'm a sailor, and this lad is a sailor's son, we'll wait until the last boat," Mr. Barnes said proudly to the mate who had called them to enter the first boat loaded entirely with men.

His wish was respected; but in a few minutes the fourth and last boat was ready for its occupants. Mr. Barnes, on account of his lameness, was among the first assisted into the yawl, and Bert immediately followed.

There were only seven passengers now, but ten of the steamer's crew, and her captain, who was the to leave the last vessel, made a large load for the yawl. All had entered the boat, however, and the officer

had given the order to cast off, when the sinking vessel lurched, and rolled to the starboard.

The bowman of the yawl saw the movement, and raised his knife to sever the line that bound the light craft to the ship, but he was too late. The steamer suddenly tipped, her stern went up, her bow went down, and she disappeared beneath the rolling waves, dragging the small boat, now capsized, in her wake.

The life-preserver, fastened below his arms, kept Bert from sinking when he was plunged into the sea, and a gigantic wave that swept up behind him at the same moment carried him beyond the suction of the foundering ship. A minute or two later he fell in with a piece of wreckage large enough to sustain him, and crawled out upon it.

Knowing that Mr. Barnes had on a life-belt similar to his own, he glanced about him, hoping to discover his friend. But neither the old sailor, nor any other of the late occupants of the yawl, were in sight, and with a despairing heart the lad concluded that he only had survived the capsizing of the boat, and was now alone upon the raging sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ISLAND PRISON.

Perhaps one of the greatest of natural phenomena is the Gulf Stream. This, as is now generally admitted, is a river in the ocean.

It has its origin somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico, and flows through the strait of Florida into the Atlantic Ocean; then turning to the left—no one knows why—it flows north and northeasterly along our coast.

There are no islands directly in this mysterious stream, but many lie to the right and left of it, the most important of which is the Bahama group.

In fact, beginning with the Great Bahama, off the eastern coast of the state of Florida, and running in a southeasterly direction, there is a continuous string of islands stretching for more than one thousand miles; and so numerous are they that one of our well-known historians has said:

"It was possible for Columbus to have landed on one of thirty-six islands, six hundred and eighty-seven cays, and two thousand four hundred and fourteen rocky islets."

When, therefore, our young hero found himself clinging to a portion of the wreck upon the tempestuous sea, it was only a question of endurance—the ability to hold on and hold out—before he would in the nature of events drift upon one of those tropical islands.

Hour after hour passed; morning came and with

it the cessation of the storm; the clouds broke; the wind died away; and still he floated on.

At the first show of light the lad had risen as high as possible out of the dashing waves, and looked eagerly about him; but he saw only a watery waste. Again and again he repeated this act, always, however, with the same aspect. At length, tired and weak, he ceased these efforts, and drifted almost unconsciously on.

Noon passed, and half the afternoon; he was hungry, and weak, and hopeless now. His hope had been to be discovered by one of the steamer's boats, or picked up by some passing ship. He had not thought of the islands, in all probability not many miles away from the place of the collision; but had he thought of them it is doubtful that he would have expected to reach one of them. Yet such was to be his fate.

It was almost sundown, when a low, booming sound fell upon his ear. At first it was too low and faint for him to pay any special attention to it; but as he floated on, it grew louder and louder, and at length seemed quite near.

Raising his head, for the first time, in several hours, he found himself but a few rods from a point of land. He was south of, and in a few minutes would have passed by, it. Gathering up all the strength he could muster, he plunged from his plank, and, supported by his life-belt, swam towards the rocky headland.

There was current enough to sweep him beyond it, notwithstanding all his efforts; but the same eddy carried him on into a little shallow cove just beyond the point, and faint and exhausted he crawled to the shore, and threw himself flat upon the sand.

How long he lay there he never knew. It was dark when he arose, and staggered to the shelter of

At the first show of light the lad had risen as high as possible out of the waves, but he saw only a watery waste.—Page 94.

Yankee Lad's Pluck.

some tall trees, not far away, where he sank almost immediately into a profound slumber.

The sun was up, sending its warm and life-giving rays down upon him when he awoke. Stiff and sore he got upon his feet, and took a survey of his landing-place.

The trees under which he had passed the night were palms there were perhaps a dozen of them; to the north of these was an opening covered with—a species of rank grass and some flowering shrubs; while beyond he could catch a glimpse of the sea. He was then on an islet.

He stepped slowly along to the point around which he had been swept the night before. This gave him a view of the ocean-side of the island. There was no beach, the reef coming up in a perpendicular wall from the ocean bed, fathoms below.

On the west, or landward side, however, there was a gradual slope to the water, with a wide, smooth, sandy shore; and as the lad took in the scene he recognized the kind Providence that had watched over him, and brought him to the only place on the cay, where he could have landed in safety.

But hunger and thirst were craving to be satisfied, and to meet these demands was his first duty.

"A fire is the first thing," he murmured, beginning to unbuckle his life-belt.

It will be remembered that before the boy left his stateroom after the collision, he had been directed by Mr. Barnes to put on the life-preserver that he—the sailor—had provided, not one of those that are to be found under the berths of every sea-going passenger steamer. It was one the old seaman had himself designed for just such a disaster as had befallen the Alhambra, and with which he had furnished both the lad and himself.

In reality it was a life-jacket; and was put on as any ordinary coat. But it was so constructed that

when once in its place a row of corks encircled the wearer just below his arm-pits; below this and on the inside of the waterproof garment were a row of pockets, in which were securely fastened, and so as to be practically water-tight, a few articles any ship wrecked person would be likely to need.

Bert had himself helped to put these articles into their snug cases, and his object in removing the life-belt was to get at the contents of its pockets.

In a minute or two his entire possessions lay on the beach before him, and few as they were he would not, just then, have accepted a fortune for them.

There was a huge clasp knife, made of the finest steel, and both a useful and formidable weapon; a box of paraffine matches; a package of soup-tablets, each one capable of making a cupful of delicious and strengthening bouillon; a collapsing drinking-cup, of good size; a fishing-line and several hooks; and two small purses, each containing fifty dollars in gold.

As the money was of no practical use under his his present circumstances, he returned it to the pocket of the life-belt from which it had been taken. The other articles he laid in a small pile on the discarded jacket, with the exception of the knife.

Opening this, he, with it in his right hand, entered the thick undergrowth beyond the palms, and soon cut quite a bundle of dry stuff, which he brought back to the beach. In another minute he had set the wood on fire with a match from the waterproof safe, and, as the flames shot up, he remarked quite cheerfully:

"Now if I can only find some water, I'll soon have breakfast."

But the water was not to be found on the lower portion of the cay; or as for that matter anywhere in the island as he later ascertained. There was,

therefore, but one thing for him to do—to munch the dry tablets, and make the best meal he could in that unpalatable way. Though he knew one tablet was intended for a meal, he ate three with a still unsatisfied appetite.

"There, I ought to get strength enough from them," he muttered, "to search a while for something to drink. But if I can't find any water, I don't know what I shall do. I might as well have perished out there at sea."

Picking up the articles he had left on the life-belt, he stowed them away in his pockets; and then throwing the jacket itself across his arm, he started up the shore, looking on every side for water.

He had not gone more than half a mile when he reached the north end of the islet, and now found that it was separated from another cay by a narrow, deep, strait; while beyond this second island, which was scarcely more than a patch of sand covered with seaweed, was a third, larger apparently than the one he was on, and covered with trees and thick vegetation.

"There is nothing here to eat or drink," he said to himself. "I will see if I can cross to that farther island."

His clothes were not yet dry from their long soaking of the previous day, and stopping, therefore, only long enough to return all his possessions to the water-tight pockets of his life-belt, he buckled that on, and plunged into the water.

He had not swam over thirty feet before he was able to touch bottom, and so waded out upon the sand-bank. From there he obtained a better view of the northern island, and saw, not only that it greatly exceeded both the others in its size, but seemed to have all the luxuriance of the tropics. It was, however, at least a half-mile over to it. He stood looking wistfully at it for some time.

"I guess I am good even for that swim," he finally declared; "I'm sure there's food there of some kind, and maybe it is inhabited. I know many of these islands are."

He entered the water, and much to his surprise was able to wade all the way across,—the water in no place exceeding a depth of four feet.

"Here is food and a partial substitute for drink," he ejaculated, as he emerged from the strait, to find himself on a salt marsh containing innumerable crabs.

It was easy to catch the crustaceans, and, breaking them open, Bert sucked the juice from the raw flesh. Possibly the reader sees nothing attractive in this operation, but to the thirsting lad it was a delicious draught; and he did not stop until he had disposed of the watery portion of at least a dozen of the shell fish.

His thirst partially quenched by this process, he ventured further into the island.

The first trees he encountered were, as he afterwards learned, the mangrove, so common at the estuaries of tropical rivers, or on the borders of tropical marshes. Making his way slowly through the thick roots and stems of these curious trees, he soon came out upon higher ground.

His attention was immediately attracted towards a grove of trees, about thirty feet high, only a few rods away, which were loaded with an orange-red fruit. Hastening over to them, he frightened away a flock of yellow birds that were making their morning breakfast among the branches. The lower limbs were not over six feet high, and catching hold of one, the boy bent it down, and plucked some of the fruit, saying:

"If the birds eat these, I reckon I can."

The fruit resembled somewhat a plum, but were nearly as large as a man's fist. A single bite proved to him that whatever the name of the fruit, it was

delicious, and he rapidly ate at least a dozen of "the plums," as he called them.

In reality they were mangoes—a prolific and wholesome fruit of these islands, and highly prized by the dwellers there.

Still continuing his explorations he went on up the west shore of the island. Passing through the mango grove, which was a large one, he came upon a patch of pineapples, and then upon nearly an acre of banana plants.

"It looks as though I shan't starve," he soliloquized; "between crabs and plums and bananas I shall surely have enough to eat. If now I can only find a spring of water I'm all right."

He had not, however, exhausted the cay. Before he had traveled a mile he had discovered groves of cocoanut palms, of oranges, and of lemons. But the two things he looked for and hoped for most, namely, a stream of fresh water, and a human habitation, were not found when he reached the northern end of the island.

No other islets were to be seen in any direction, and he rightly concluded that the three, on all of which he had now been, made up the entire group.

"I must have walked two miles," he said, as he rested under a gigantic palm; "and that must be about the length of the island. I will go back by the east shore, and so shall obtain some idea of its width."

He built a fire; dried his wet clothing; made another meal of three soup-tablets, and a half-dozen bananas he had brought along with him; and washed the repast down with the milk of a large cocoanut he found under the palm where he was sitting, and which he opened with his knife.

"I'd give a good deal for a drink of cool water," he thought; "but I'm neither going to starve or die of thirst here;" then he resumed his journey.

He walked rapidly along the north shore of the cay; this was not a point, but a succession of small bays or inlets, which finally terminated in a larger promontory, making off from the main island in an easterly direction.

Clambering slowly up this, he finally reached its summit. Then one glance at the shore below him filled him with surprise and delight.

Running from the end of the point on which he stood to the south, and so protecting the eastern side of the islet, was a long reef. On this, high out of the water, was a wreck, while just opposite, on the beach which the reef guarded, were two men, busily engaged in cooking their dinner.

Dashing down the point, and along the shore, Bert soon reached the two men, who stopped from their labors, and stared in astonishment at the newcomer.

Their swarthy complexion and manner of dress showed they were either Cubans or Spaniards, and profoundly thankful to Mr. Barnes for having taught him to speak Spanish, the lad said:

"Buenos dias, señors"—good day, sirs.

"Buenos dias, señor," was the civil reply.

Then as clearly as he could with the Spanish he had mastered Bert explained who he was, and how he came to be there.

The men, both of whom were young, heard him through, and then, pointing toward the wreck, they told their story.

They were Cubans—passengers on the schooner which had gone on to the reef. She had been used to run a load of arms and ammunition into the island of Cuba for the use of the insurgents. Her load once delivered, she sailed for the States, bringing the two passengers, who were bearing special messages to the Cuban Junta in New York city.

In the recent gale she had been badly damaged,

and her captain washed overboard; the crew, fearing the vessel would sink, hurriedly abandoned her —so hurriedly in fact that the two Cubans, who were asleep in their staterooms, had been left behind.

Clinging to the helpless craft, they had expected any moment to go down with her; but to their joy she, though water-logged, kept afloat, and finally drifted upon the reef where she was now lying.

This had occurred on the previous afternoon, and before night the storm had so far abated the men were not only able to reach the land, but to bring with them many articles of food from the stranded ship.

This long explanation ended in their kindly inviting the young American, first to share in their meal, and then to make one of their party until all could be rescued by some passing vessel.

Thus began an island imprisonment, that, contrary to the expectation of every one of the three castaways, lasted through many weary months.

place, being screwed to the floor, but everything else was heaped on the lower side of the cabin. Even the lockers had been burst open by the violence of the vessel's heavings.

They next went into the store-room amidships. There was less devastation here, and with satisfaction they beheld a supply of provisions ample for their need for weeks to come.

In the forecastle, however, they again found things badly stove; but as there was little there beside the crew's kits, nothing of any great value was damaged.

In the cook's galley scarcely a thing remained in its place, and stove and crockery were broken; but the pots and kettles and other utensils were in a condition for use, and there was an abundance of them.

In the schooner's hold there was six feet of water, but, as she carried no cargo, the searchers gave that matter no second thought.

"There is enough here to set up housekeeping," Bert remarked in Spanish to his companions, when their search was finished; "and the first thing is to get it on shore."

He looked off towards the island. Then he clambered up to the extreme end of the bow, and, with his eye on a level with the broken bowsprit, glanced across to the beach.

Instantly his plan was formed, and as well as possible, by word and gesture, he made it known to the Cubans.

"Let us run a cable," he said, "from the bow of the schooner to that big tree under which we ate dinner. It will clear the water all of ten feet; then we'll rig a sling stout enough to hold two or three hundred pounds' weight, and run this truck to the shore on the same plan they run a life-buoy. Two of us can work here, the other can receive the

goods on the beach. If we give our cable a decline of two or three feet at the shore-end, the loaded sling will, when once started, run to the island by its own weight; while it will be no trouble to pull the unloaded sling back."

It took some time, owing to the defects in Bert's Spanish vocabulary, to make his plan intelligible to his comrades, but as soon as it was comprehended they enthusiastically adopted it. A huge hawser was carried to the shore, and firmly fastened to the trunk of the large palm a few feet from the ground. Then, by the aid of the schooner's windlass, which was still intact, the cable was pulled taut. On this the sling was adjusted, and in three hours all was in readiness for the transfer of the goods. To test the apparatus a barrel of salt-junk was rolled into the sling, and the pulleys were put in motion. Slowly the car moved at first, but, gaining new impetus with each foot of descent, it finally went off at a rate which compelled the watchers to use their pulley-rope as a brake. In two minutes the sling with its load reached the beach in safety, and the toilers knew their plan was a success.

They now stopped for a cold lunch of canned-beef and hard-tack. Then they fell to work in dead earnestness. Bert and the older Cuban remained on the vessel, while their comrade took his station on the shore to unload the goods. With this division of labor, that did away with all going back and forth to the beach, they were able during the rest of the afternoon to land an amount of stuff that surprised themselves; and within the next two days they had stripped the schooner of everything likely to be of use.

While removing the goods they had made a temporary habitation for themselves by packing the boxes and barrels sent ashore from the vessel into a hollow square, and then stretching a piece of can-

vas over them. But the work once finished, they turned their first attention to a more suitable abode.

Believing their sojourn in the island would be brief, they decided to construct their cabin of sail-cloth, a large amount of which had been brought from the vessel.

There were the main-sail, the fore-sail, three jibs, two top-sails, one triangular sheet, and a number of odd pieces of canvas. These were all eyed, and there was much rope and seizing-stuff.

When this had been sorted out and measured, two trees, twenty feet apart, were selected as the corner posts for the first side of the house. Between these a piece of sail twenty feet long and eighteen feet wide was stretched taut, and it edges nailed to the trees from the ground up a distance of six feet.

Then two other trees parallel with the first two, and about sixteen feet away, were chosen, and another piece of sail of the same dimensions as the first was fastened to them in precisely the same way. Thus two sides of the tent were formed.

The roof was made by bringing that portion of the two sails not fastened to the trees together, and lacing them to a ridge pole, held in place by two standards, cut from the booms of the schooner. Then the two ends were filled in with canvas, making the front and back of a structure sixteen by twenty feet.

This was immediately divided into three rooms by walls of sail-cloth. The first, at the front of the tent, was ten by sixteen feet, and became the kitchen, dining-room, and parlor of the house. The rear was made into two rooms of equal size, eight by ten feet, one being the store-room, and the other the bedroom of the cabin.

In the bedroom three bunks were erected by driving uprights into the ground, and spiking roughly

trimmed poles to them, making a frame six feet by two and a half, and two feet from the earth. On these sail-cloth was first stretched tightly for a bottom; and then mattresses brought from the vessel completed the bed.

In the living room were placed the table, chairs, and other furniture from the schooner's cabin; while the kits of the crew furnished receptacles for the clothing, utensils, and tools that had been brought from the same treasure-house.

In the store-room were packed all the articles that needed to be kept dry; but the barrels of salt-junk, pork, and water were rolled into the shade of the palm trees, and covered with sail-cloth to further protect them from the sun's rays.

Knowing that the supply of water brought from the vessel was limited and would soon be exhausted, an arrangement was made to secure a new supply with the first rain. Eave-troughs were placed on both sides of the tent-roof, and conductors to lead the water to four casks placed, one at each end, of these troughs.

Later it was found, however, that even this arrangement was not sufficient to meet their needs; and, at the suggestion of the Cubans, their water supply was finally obtained in the same manner the dwellers on the larger cays of that region secure theirs—by sinking a well down through the coral substratum of the island. This was not so hard a task as might be imagined; since, when once through the outer coating of the coral, it becomes soft and is easily removed to any depth.

A week had passed before the cabin and its arrangements were fully completed, and as yet there had been no sign of a passing vessel. It was, therefore, now determined to make a daily patrol of the island, in order to keep a lookout on all sides for a rescuing ship.

The resources of the island were also drawn upon, so as not to exhaust their stores too rapidly. But they soon found they were in no danger of starving. The fruits of the cay were abundant; yams grew in one part of the islet, of good size and very edible; fowl of many kinds were there for the killing; and the sea furnished fish of a dozen varieties and in a large quantities.

Three weeks after they began their sojourn there, they also found that the center island of the tiny group, barren, as at first it seemed, was really destined to furnish them with an important supply of food. Turtles came there to deposit their eggs, and they soon became skilful, not only in finding the eggs, but also in catching the turtles themselves. Turtle soup and turtle-egg omelet became, therefore, a regular part of their varied diet.

As the months wore away, and no vessel appeared, the faces of the island prisoners grew long and care-worn. It was evident that they must be out of the usual line of travel between the American cities and the islands to the south; and there was now serious thought on the part of all of trying to construct some sort of a craft by which they could reach some of the inhabited islands, surely not many miles away.

April came, however, and the problem of escape still remained unsolved, when, by an unlooked-for circumstance, their despair was suddenly changed to hope.

Early one morning Bert had gone to the salt marsh at the southern end of the cay to shoot fowl. Creeping cautiously through the mangrove trees, that he might get a shot at the birds before he was himself discovered, he came to an opening where, over the sandy bank of the center islet, he caught sight of smoke rising from the south island of the group—the one on which he had first landed.

Wondering what it could mean, he hastened back to the upland, and climbed the nearest tree to a height of twenty feet or more. This gave him an unobstructed view over the mangrove swamp and sandy cay, and with a sudden hope that his own rescue and that of his comrades was now at hand, he looked eagerly towards the islet from which the smoke was still rising.

His position enabled him to see the whole of the southern cay, and, to his surprise, he now beheld two large sail-boats, anchored within the little bay where several months before he had himself crawled ashore; while under the very palms where he had spent the first night of his island imprisonment was a rude camp, about which several men and women and children were gathered, eating breakfast.

Four yawls were drawn up on the sandy beach; several heaps of black stuff lay in the sun; and what looked like huge forks and great drag-nets were scattered about the encampment or along the shore.

Deeming it wiser to acquaint his companions with his discovery before he made further investigation, Bert descended from the tree and hastened off to his own camp.

Quickly making known the presence of the visitors to the Cubans—no difficult task now, as their long sojourn together had perfected the American lad in his use of Spanish, and the Cubans on their part in the speaking of English—all three armed themselves with guns or revolvers saved from the stranded schooner, and went back to Bert's place of observation.

Selecting trees near enough together to allow them to converse with each other in low tones, they ascended into the branches, and scrutinized the newcomers.

Since the boy first discovered them, the strangers

had finished their meal, and the men were now arranging to enter their small boats.

A man and a youth stepped into each, and pushed off—the lad sculling, the man taking his place in the bow of the light craft, with what looked like a large five-pronged fork, with a very long handle, in his hands.

No sooner had the Cubans seen these movements, than they exclaimed, simultaneously :

"They are sponge-gatherers! We are saved! We are saved!" and dropping to the ground they indulged in the most frantic demonstrations of joy.

CHAPTER XVI.

STARTLING NEWS.

When his companions uttered their joyful cry, there at once flashed into the mind of the lad a portion of a geography lesson he had learned in his school days:

"One of the principal industries of these islands (Bahama) is that of sponge-gathering. Hundreds of men and boys are employed in diving or dredging for this important article of commerce; and numerous bales of the dried sponges are sold in the markets of the United States and other parts of the world."

He could almost see himself again reciting glibly this passage to his teacher; but with the words came the assurance that the Cubans were right. An avenue of escape from their island imprisonment was really at hand, and no less elated than his comrades, he followed them to the ground and joined in their shouts of joy.

It was low tide, and regardless of a wetting, they, leaving their weapons behind, rushed into the water and waded over to the center islet. Here they had but to call out loudly to attract the attention of the men in the approaching boats.

Instantly the yawls stopped, while their occupants stared curiously at the three ill-clad and dripping figures.

Again, in Spanish, the trio called loudly for the boats to come to their assistance.

At this renewed cry the advance boat dropped back to the others, and the men engaged in low but earnest conversation for a few minutes; then a stout man of perhaps sixty years, apparently the leader of the party, asked in good English:

"Who are you?"

Delighted to hear his native tongue spoken again, Bert stepped closer to the channel's edge, saying:

"I am an American, and my companions are Cubans. We were cast away on this island seven months ago. Come over in your boats, and take us to your encampment. Then we'll tell you the whole story; and we hope you will help us to get back to our home and friends."

There was another moment of consultation, and then the same man said:

"We'll come for you at once, sir."

Immediately two of the yawls were pushed over to the cay, and Bert entered one, and the two Cubans the other. Then they were sculled rapidly back to the little bay where the two sloops were anchored, and run ashore in front of the camp.

There were three rude huts, and from them there came flocking three women, several half-grown girls and boys, and two or three smaller children, to see the newly arrived strangers.

All gathered closely around the newcomers, and listened with gaping mouths to the story Bert now told. He closed his tale with the words:

"Through all these months of watching and waiting not a passing vessel have we seen. You are the first human beings we have looked upon. Where are we? Who are you? Where do you come from? Will you help us to escape from our imprisonment, which has become almost unendurable?"

The questions of the lad were quickly answered.

The group of cays that had for so long a time been their home was on a line running from the

Great Exuma Island to Point de Maysi, the extreme eastern end of Cuba, and about one hundred miles south of the former island, which was the home of the sponge-gatherers. It was a little out of the usual course of the vessels plying between any of the island ports, and this accounted, as the shipwrecked men had already surmised, for their long and fruitless waiting for some ship to take them away.

As for the sponge-gatherers themselves—their leader was John Gowth, an Englishman by birth, but a man who had lived so long in the Bahamas, those islands seemed more like home to him than his native land. The oldest woman was his wife, a native of Great Exuma. The two younger men were his sons, and the younger women their wives; while the other members of the party were his children and grandchildren—in all they numbered sixteen souls.

The reason for their coming to the cays at this time was due to the following fact: The summer before Mr. Gowth had been driven by a storm into the little bay of the south islet. Before he departed he discovered that the surrounding waters were rich in sponges; and he left with the fixed purpose of some time returning to reap the fruits of his discovery.

But a combination of circumstances had prevented his carrying out that purpose until two days before, when with his sons and their families he had arrived, and begun the long delayed work.

As to the eager question of the island prisoners, whether he would help them to escape, he kindly replied:

"When we go, you certainly may go with us. But we have, at considerable cost to ourselves, arranged for a sojourn here until we have secured a full load of sponges for our sloops. We cannot afford to depart until that end is accomplished. If, however, you will turn and to help us in the work, it

will shorten the time we have to remain here, and we will allow you your share in the value of the sponges we gather."

Bert's first thought was to offer Mr. Gowth the hundred dollars in gold, which he (unknown to the Cubans) still had in his possession, for an immediate passage for himself and friends to the nearest port; then he reflected that he might need every dollar of this sum to enable him to continue his journey to San Juan after he had once reached some center of civilization, and so was in doubt as to the wisdom of making such a proposal.

His friends must have long since given him up for dead, and a few weeks' delay, now that he was sure of escape, could make but little difference. Perhaps it would be wiser to accept Mr. Gowth's terms, and for a while turn sponge-gatherer. Finding that the Cubans, eager as they were to get out of their exile, heartily favored the Englishman's proposition, he finally decided that it was the wiser course to follow, and as cheerfully as possible accepted the plan.

Anxious now in their turn to show their own good-will, he and his comrades told of the fruitfulness of the northern cay, of its advantages as a place of residence, and of their own well-appointed camp, equipped with conveniences the sponge-gatherers did not have, and ended by offering all they possessed to their new friends.

The result of this information was an immediate visit on the part of Mr. Gowth to the upper island with the Cubans and Bert; and finding it possible to bring the sloops inside of the lagoon, in front of the tent, and that outside of the reef there was rich sponging grounds, he at once made arrangements for a transfer of his own encampment to that place. Henceforth it was the headquarters of the sponge industry.

One hut was left at the lower cay, however, since, in case of an easterly or southeasterly storm, it might be necessary to take the sloops down there, as the little bay afforded the best harbor in the whole group.

An abundance of canvas was still left the shipwrecked men, and out of this three tents, similar to the one they occupied, but not so large, were erected and soon the encampment was busy with life.

The sponge-gatherers had come equipped for all the methods now employed in securing sponges in the Bahamas. They had their long-handled, five-pronged harpoons, for securing the sponges in water of but a few fathoms' depth. This was the work they were about to engage in when discovered by the island prisoners.

In this method a boy steers the boat, while the man, armed with his formidable harpoon, stands in the bow, gazing down into the clear water. On discovering the sponge, he, with a dexterous movement that comes only from long practise, plunges the fork down into the sea, tears the sponge from its growing place, and hauls it to the surface, where it is hauled into the yawl. This process continues until the boat is loaded, when it is brought to the camp.

The dredging operation is a more complicated affair. The dredge itself resembles a huge scoop—six yards wide at the mouth, one yard high, and backed by a coarse network made of cords the thickness of the finger. This is weighted and sunk to a great depth, and then drawn along the sea bottom by a tow-line from the sloop. When loaded with the sponges it has torn from their watery bed, it is brought in as near the beach as possible by the vessel, then dragged in by hand upon the shore.

The diving process is carried on at even a greater depth, and in its original method was the simplest

of all the ways used to secure the sponges. A naked man, with a cord attached to his waist, and a huge knife in his hand, dives down to the bottom, quickly severs an armful of the sponge from its resting-place, and returns to the surface. So expert does the diver become in this work, and so accustomed to being underneath the water, that he thinks little of his task, and in an almost incredibly short time fills the boat to overflowing with the sponge.

At the present time, however, the diving process is in many cases carried on with all the apparatus of the diver's suit and life-line. The man remaining for hours under water, and the sponges he gathers are hauled to the surface by his comrades in the accompanying boat.

The sponge-gatherers who were now at the cays had a single diving apparatus with them, but intended to use it only when they had exhausted the sponges in the shallower depths.

The cleaning process of the sponges is the same in whatever way they may be collected. They are brought to the shore, and left for a day in the open air. Then they are beaten with thick sticks, until the soft tissues are removed, after which they are rinsed in fresh water, thoroughly dried, and packed in bundles.

The one drawback to a permanent sponge industry in the cays was the absence of a running stream. But for this the newcomers had provided in a measure. They had brought several huge casks of water with them, and quickly adopted the two methods already used by the castaways to replenish their stock, namely: putting eve-troughs along the tents, with barrels at every corner to catch the precious fluid when it rained; and the sinking of wells through the coral bed-rock until water was found.

The women and children for the most part did the work of cleansing; thus leaving the men free to continue daily their own work of procuring the sponges.

Now followed one of the busiest months in our young hero's life. At first he was assigned to boat-steering, while the Cubans were employed in dredging. But before a week had elapsed they all had become so used to the ways and means employed, that they could be used at almost any point where a hand was needed.

When the work was once well under way, a bale of sponges a day was a fair average for the company of toilers, and just a month after the sponge-gatherers came a sloop-load was ready for marketing. Mr. Gowth, therefore, and a boy, with the three castaways, left the island for Farmer's cay, the finest station on Exuma, possessing a harbor of great beauty.

In twenty hours they reached there, and stopping only long enough for Mr. Gowth to greet friends, and obtain a fresh supply of provisions, they again sailed for Nassau, on the island of New Providence, ninety miles away.

A strong breeze from the south enabled them to make the run in twelve hours, and on the morning of May 2d they entered the harbor.

Scarcely was their anchor down when a boat put out from a neighboring vessel, and came alongside, bringing the startling news that the United States had declared war with Spain; the harbor of Havana was blockaded; and several vessels flying the Spanish flag were already captured.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BOMBARDMENT OF SAN JUAN.

It is a question who was the most excited over this startling news—the American lad, or the Cuban men. Eagerly they asked the man who had made the announcement for fuller details, finding that he had in that single sentence really told them all he knew.

"We can get the full particulars at the United States consular office," suggested the older Cuban; "and if we were only in a presentable garb I should advise our going there at once."

"We will go on shore and purchase the presentable garbs," said Bert with a smile. Then he told the two fellows, who had for so long a time been his sole companions, of the money he possessed.

"I have one hundred dollars in gold in one of the pockets of my cork-jacket; and have purposely kept it for just such an emergency as this," he said. "We will all go on shore, purchase the clothing, secure rooms at the hotel, and then call on the consul."

His friends protested against his using the money for them, saying they had friends in New York, and possibly could arrange some way to draw upon them for whatever amounts they might need.

"Well, we'll get the outfits, and arrange that matter later," Bert persisted.

Captain Gowth also desired to visit the city, and in a short time all four were landed on the nearest wharf.

In a clothing store but a short distance from the dock the lad and his comrades were soon fitted out with everything they needed at a reasonable price, and, in a back-room of the establishment, speedily transformed themselves, so that they hardly knew each other. Then, inquiring their way to a good hotel, they soon sat down to the finest breakfast they had eaten in many months.

They did not have to wait until they visited the consul, however, to ascertain the details of the war. At the table with them was an Englishman, who, learning they were recent arrivals in the city, told them the story of the blowing up of the Maine in Havana harbor, of the dismissal of the American minister from Madrid, and the formal declaration of war by the United States Congress for the purpose of securing the liberty of Cuba.

The effect of this recital upon the Cubans was plainly visible. With flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes they declared they should sail at the first opportunity for New York, and offer their services to the United States government; and, when the reciter of these stirring items added that the blockading of the Cuban ports doubtless would be rapidly followed by the blockading of Porto Rico, Bert was equally anxious to depart for San Juan at the earliest moment.

Their interview with the consul an hour later was very satisfactory. That gentleman received them courteously, and listened attentively to their stories.

Then he said to the Cubans:

"A steamer leaves here to-morrow for New York. I will cable your friends in that city, and advance you whatever amount they direct. Meantime I will engage your passages. Call at nine in the morning and we will adjust these matters."

To Bert he added:

"I have heard of you, young man. In fact inquiries about you have been very much in evidence the last six or seven months. A man named Loomis in your native village has directed me to spare no expense to ascertain your fate; and your father's bankers in San Juan have notified me to follow up any clew that might lead to your discovery regardless of the cost."

"You see three boats of the ill-fated Alhambra reached Cat Island in safety, and the passengers were brought to this city. Nothing was known of the fourth boat, and it was generally believed that the steamer went down before it could be launched with all on board.

"But several weeks later your friend Mr. Barnes appeared on the scene. His cork-jacket had kept him afloat until he was picked up by a tramp steamer, that carried him to the coast of Africa. From there he cabled your father, and, as soon as the return passage could be made, joined him in Porto Rico. Both refuse to believe that you are dead, and every consul in these islands has been asked to keep a lookout for you. I advise you, therefore, to cable your friends in the States and also at San Juan of your rescue."

"Then Mr. Barnes escaped!" cried the lad joyfully, when the consul had done speaking. "I'm so glad! But how soon can I get a passage for the island!"

"Don't go," answered the officer, sententiously; "let your father know of your safety, but either return to the States, or await his orders here. Things may be very unpleasant in Porto Rico before this war is over, and it will be better for you to keep out of the island for the present. Draw on me for whatever money you may need until your plans are formed."

But this advice was not to Bert's liking. He

desired to join his father, and while going back to his hotel hit upon a scheme which he believed would enable him to sail for San Juan before the consul knew of it, or his father could forbid it.

Stepping up to the clerk in the hotel office, as soon as he arrived there, he asked:

"Do you know of any vessel that will leave here for Porto Rico soon? Either a steamer or a sailing craft will answer my purpose."

"I do not," the clerk answered, politely; "but I will make inquiries for you, if you wish."

"Thank you; I wish you would," the boy replied.

He now went and cabled Mr. Loomis, asking him to tell his aunt of his safety, and inform her that he should join his father in Porto Rico at once. But the cablegram to his father's bankers he purposely withheld until he should have secured a passage for the island.

While he was busy writing a long letter to his aunt, telling the story of his island imprisonment and final rescue, Captain Gowth called. He had sold his load of sponges at a good figure, and had now come to settle with the boy and the Cubans, and so generous was he with his pay that all three were sure they would now need no financial help from the consul in order to reach their respective destinations.

At supper-time the hotel clerk informed Bert that there was a British brig in port which would sail for Porto Rico on the following day, and it might be possible for him to obtain a passage on her.

Inquiring where he could find the vessel, he was told that her captain was just then in the hotel reading-room, and he at once accepted the offer of the clerk to be introduced to him.

Two minutes later he was telling his story to Captain Mattox, a big burly Englishman, and closed with the anxious question:

"Now, Captain, can I secure a passage with you for San Juan?"

"I'll certainly let you go along with me," the Britisher said, heartily. "But I won't promise to deliver you safely in the city, for I'm not sure of getting there myself. I hope, however, to get in there before the port is blockaded by the United States warships. It's worth a pretty penny to my shippers if I can do so."

Then lowering his voice he added:

"Get your traps ready, and go on board with me to-night at eight. The general report is that I am to sail to-morrow, but the fact is I shall be miles outside before the light of another day."

Thanking him for his kindness, the lad hastened his preparations. He added a postscript to the letter he had already written his aunt, giving the name of the vessel on which he had taken passage for San Juan, and the hour of his sailing.

He then went to the telegraph office, and finding there was still an uninterrupted cable with Porto Rico, sent the following message to his father's bankers:

"Nassau, N. P., May 2, 1898.

"To Marinos, Tempero, and Vandenti,

"San Juan, Porto Rico.

"Send word to Captain Albert Larkin that I am alive and well—just rescued from an island imprisonment of seven months. Sail to-day for San Juan on British Brig Henrietta.

"Bert Larkin."

His last half hour was spent with the Cubans, from whom he now parted with much regret. They already knew something of his plans, and sympathized with him, but for the first time now heard them in detail.

After explaining how he had secured an oppor-

tunity to leave Nassau immediately for his destination, he said, laughingly:

"When you call on the consul to-morrow morning tell him I have stolen a march on him, and am already well on my way towards San Juan. Inform him, however, that I obeyed him in sending word of my escape to my friends, and thank him for his offer of funds,—an offer I did not need to accept."

At eight o'clock, with a neat and trim valise in his hand, and looking every inch a traveler, he stepped into Captain Mattox's yawl, and was taken off to the brig, a staunch vessel of six hundred tons.

A stateroom next to the captain's was soon got ready for him, and at ten he was sleeping soundly. Several hours later he aroused enough to become aware by the motion of the vessel that they were at sea.

"We are off," he murmured; "I shall soon be with father," and turning over in his berth he sank into a fitful sleep. He seemed to be following his father over hills, through forests, and across streams; there were many strange faces in the scenes through which he passed, and some were threatening and some friendly. Prominent among the latter was the countenance of Lawyer Greene, of Goodport, only in the dream he seemed to be an officer of high rank in the army. He awoke before the dream was finished, and before he had found his father, and was troubled by that circumstance for some time.

But it was a beautiful day, and after a hearty breakfast he went on deck, and soon threw off his depressed feelings; he had occasion to recall that dream many times, however, before he saw his father.

The brig, though a staunch vessel, was not a fast sailer; the winds were light; and the nine hundred miles between Nassau and San Juan were, therefore, logged off slowly.

It was the afternoon of the eighth day out before the mountains of the island were seen, and then the sudden appearance of a large steamer, with the stars and stripes at her masthead, caused the captain to change his course, and bear off towards the Danish island of St. Thomas.

Rapidly the steamer overhauled the brig, and when she was about two miles off, she sent a shot flying across the bow of the fleeing vessel.

Captain Mattox responded by running the British flag up to the brig's peak, but kept straight on his course. As soon as the flag was seen the war vessel saluted, and, sheering off, ran back towards the harbor of San Juan.

"I reckoned that would satisfy her," the watching captain remarked to Bert. "She has no reason to make a fuss with that flag."

"But you'll have to give up going into San Juan, won't you?" the lad inquired, somewhat anxiously.

"Not much. Wait until night falls, and see," was the laconic answer.

In two hours the sun went down, and as the darkness settled over the deep the course of the brig was changed, and under a favoring breeze she sped back towards the island, perhaps forty miles away.

Her skipper, moreover, evidently knew his ground, for he ran close into the island, then along under its shadow, and at a little after midnight was off San Juan harbor.

Hugging close into the shore, the vessel sped around the island point, on which the city is situated, and for fear of the forts, came to anchor. But with early light she signaled for a pilot, and was soon under way again.

With her flag flying at her peak she glided into the inner harbor, and was safe. But it was none too soon, for in less than twenty-four hours Sampson's fleet lay off Morro Castle.

As Captain Mattox prepared to visit the city, he said to his passenger :

"I know how anxious you must be to get on shore ; but until we learn the lay of things I advise you to pass yourself for an English boy, and my ward."

To this Bert readily assented, and they were rowed over to the docks. Their first call was at the British consul's. There they learned there was no United States consul in the city, and that the English consular office was attending to all the American affairs.

When told who the lad was, and his purpose in coming to the island, the official looked grave.

" I know your father very well," he said ; " but so far as I know he has not been up to the city for at least thirty days, and there are rumors that things are not as pleasant down in his region as they might be. Marinos, Tempero, and Vandenti are, however, a reliable firm, and as you have cabled them of your coming, we will call there as soon as I have finished business with Captain Mattox."

In a half-hour, therefore, they went over to the office of the bankers.

Mr. Marinos, the senior member of the firm, was in, and greeted the boy cordially.

" I received your cablegram," he explained to Bert, " and at once sent a trusty messenger down to the plantation with it ; but he has not returned, though he should have been back at least five days ago. I cannot account for his delay, nor for some other facts, unless there is trouble down there."

" What trouble could there be ? " asked the lad, apprehensively.

" Well, your father is an American, and Spaniards and Americans are not the best friends just now," the banker said, reluctantly. " Then there is a lawless gang down there in those mountains, who,

taking advantage of the present trouble between our governments, are running things their own way."

"Is it any more than rumor?" questioned the consul.

"I fear it is," replied Mr. Marinos, with a shake of his head.

"What had I better do then?" inquired the boy.

"Stay here until I can send a second messenger down to the Anvil," responded the banker. "I will gladly receive you into my house, if you desire."

"It will be safer for him to remain with me," the consul suggested, quickly.

"Yes," admitted Mr. Marinos; "especially if the city is besieged, as it is likely to be. But spare no expense, sir, to make the lad comfortable, and I will pay the bills, for his father has large sums deposited with me. I will also send you word when my second messenger returns. He shall be despatched to-day."

More worried than he cared to show Bert accompanied the consul back to his office, and, later in the day, across the bay to San Tuice, a delightful suburb, where was the consular residence.

Before they went it was known that the United States warships were approaching the harbor, and intense anxiety prevailed in the city and the surrounding towns.

Mrs. Ralston, the consul's wife, was much alarmed, and it needed every assurance her husband could give her to allay her fears.

"We are out of all danger here," he repeatedly said; "and there is no danger at the consular office as long as the British flag floats above its door."

Between the excitement attending the presence of the fleet, and the uncertainty of his father's whereabouts, it is not strange that our hero felt little like sleep when shown to his room in the consul's home.

In spite of himself, his dream on the night he left Nassau would recur to his mind, and for a long time he walked his room in a state of mingled anxiety and alarm.

At length he threw himself, without undressing, upon his bed, and sank into a troubled sleep.

From this he was suddenly awakened by a loud booming. It took him a moment to collect his thoughts. As he waited, a second boom, followed by a tremendous explosion that shook the building. Then he knew where he was, and what was happening.

He was in San Juan, and Sampson had begun to bombard the forts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW FRIEND.

At that moment a knock came at his door, and the voice of the consul said :

"Wake up, Mr. Larkin ! The firing has begun, and I thought you might wish to go with us to a hill back of the house, where we shall have a good view of the harbor and its fortifications."

In an instant the lad was on his feet.

"I will join you in a minute," he answered.

It was scarcely more than that when he descended to the dining-room, where he met Mr. and Mrs. Ralston. They first had a light lunch and hot coffee, and then left the house for the summit of a high hill not many rods back of the consular residence.

It was just at sunrise. Across the sparkling water of the harbor was the city ; to the left was Morro Castle and the lighthouse ; while beyond, at the entrance of the bay, lay the great warships, with their steam and smoke rising high in the heavens.

"That's the Indiana there at the right!" cried Mr. Ralston. "Now watch!"

He had hardly spoken when a great, rolling, white cloud, blended with a red sheaf of flame, spouted out from her turret, and the watchers saw what looked like a black ball dart across the sky on a low curve. It was an eleven-hundred-pound shell, and it struck just back of Morro Castle, and the

next instant fire flashed out on all sides where it struck, and great fragments of earth and stone flew up.

"Whew!" whistled Bert, "that was a good one."

They stood looking at the fort for some moments before the heavy boom of a gun shook the windows of the houses about them, to be followed instantly by the sound of the explosion of the shell back of the castle. The whole city appeared to throw back the echoes to the seaward.

There was another sound, too, like low thunder, or like the rumbling of a freight-train passing over a bridge at a distance. This the consul declared to be the roaring of the great projectiles through the air.

The New York, Sampson's flag-ship, was firing also at the fort; and soon they heard the eight and twelve-inch guns of the Iowa. But none of them shook the windows like the thirteen-inch guns of the Indiana.

Every fort was now replying, and soon there was such a cloud of smoke that the observers lost sight of the ships entirely. The roar, however, was almost continuous; and the fortifications being nearer, their guns drowned those of the ironclads.

The little party were so much excited and interested in what they saw that they did not notice the approach of a gentleman, until a hearty voice said in English:

"Good morning, Ralston! Good morning, madam! and good morning, youngster!"

"Good morning, Swallow!" responded the consul, shaking hands vigorously with the newcomer, adding: "I didn't know you were up to the city, sir."

"Came up from the ranch yesterday, and ran over here last evening to stay with an old acquaint-

ance," explained the gentleman. "That is his party over on the opposite hill. I noticed you here, and came across to see you."

"I'm glad you did; but, by the way, Swallow, this is a youngster you will be interested in. Mr. Swallow, Master Albert Larkin, son of Captain Larkin, your neighbor—as you count neighbors over there in the east part of the island."

Bert turned instantly and gave the man a searching look.

He was a tall, stout gentleman of perhaps forty years, in the typical dress of the planter; but there was a frank, open face that was to be trusted, and the lad felt he had found a friend the moment he stepped forward to acknowledge this formal introduction.

The man, however, only stared at him; and it was not until he had said: "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Swallow, and trust you can tell me something of my father," that the gentleman recovered himself enough to exclaim:

"Then you aren't dead after all! That's what both Barnes and the captain maintained the last time they were over to my hacienda; but I told them it was holding out against every reasonable hope. I shall have to take it back though, won't I? But tell me where you have been ever since last September, and how you happen to turn up here now."

Quickly Bert told of his island imprisonment, and then asked, eagerly:

"But when was my father at your house, Mr. Swallow? How long ago was it?"

"About two months ago. Barnes and he had been up here, and were on their way back to the Anvil. They stopped over night with me, as they always do when making the trip," responded the planter, now recovering from his evident surprise in

meeting the boy sufficiently to shake hands heartily with him.

"Haven't you seen or heard anything from them since then, Mr. Swallow?" inquired the lad in apparent disappointment.

"Yes," he replied; "about a month ago I was over at their ranch. They were well then, and I've heard nothing to the contrary since my visit. You see," he added by way of explanation, "it is twenty miles through the mountains to your father's plantation, and we don't often see each other."

Mr. Ralston now interrupted, and told why Bert was so anxious.

It was now Mr. Swallow's turn to grow grave.

"It looks bad, that's a fact," he admitted. "I own up that there is a gang of brigands operating in the mountains—has been for some time—raiding the villages, robbing travelers, and terrorizing the whole neighborhood. That is what I went over to Larkin's to see him about. I wanted to consult with him and Barnes about putting an end to the rascals' depredations; we decided, however, that it was wiser to complain to the district authorities rather than take things into our own hands. They promised to send a force into the hills and disperse the robbers, but have never done so. I took care also to warn both Larkin and Barnes, before I left their ranch, to keep a sharp lookout, as the fact that they were Americans might work against them if war broke out."

Noticing the lad's troubled face at this frank admission of the planter, the consul quickly called the attention of his party to the changed position of the American fleet.

The smoke had now blown away, and they saw that five of the warships had approached closer to the fortifications. While they were watching them the New York suddenly opened fire on the castle,

and they saw the masonry fly like chaff as the heavy projectiles struck it. A few minutes later the Iowa also began firing her heavy guns at the fort and light-tower.

They also saw several shells sweep above the fortifications, and fall in or near that quarter of the city which is just back of Morro, and wondered if they did much damage.

Terrible as the sight was they enjoyed it. It was exciting and thrilling, though great devastation followed in the wake of every one of those great shells.

Soon another immense cloud of smoke and dust hid everything from view in the direction of the city; the smoke from the warships, too, drifted across the harbor and brought with it the acrid smell of gunpowder.

Under these circumstances the watchers had to judge of the progress of the battle wholly by the sense of hearing; and it was not long before they detected that the firing of the forts had ceased.

"I wonder if they are disabled," remarked Mr. Swallow.

"No, the fleet has also ceased firing," Mr. Ralston replied, listening a moment; "and when the smoke lifts we may be able to tell the cause."

They were surprised, when the smoke drifted away, to see the castle not seriously damaged, and yet the ships abandoning the fight.

"I don't see what they are doing that for," Bert said in perplexity.

"Possibly the elevation of the Morro above the sea renders the shots of the vessels ineffective," suggested the consul.

They knew later, however, that the real object of the bombardment had been to locate the forts, and to test the accuracy of their fire; and this certainly had been successfully accomplished, and no damage done to the warships whatever.

It was now half-past six. They had been out there over two hours, and were glad to return to the house for rest and refreshments.

Mr. Swallow, at the invitation of the consul, accompanied them. While they were eating breakfast Bert heard the guest say that he was to leave early the following day for his ranch.

The lad glanced wishfully over at Mr. Ralston, whom he regarded as his guardian and protector for the time.

"Why cannot I go along with Mr. Swallow as far as his plantation?" he asked. "From there it will be easy to communicate with father."

"Of course it will," assented the planter, heartily. "I will ride over with you myself. Let the boy go, Ralston."

"I can see no harm in it," said that gentleman, slowly, "and will consent, if Marinos does. We'll see him to-day."

The banker was uneasy when this proposition was made to him. But Mr. Swallow was so sure he could look out for the lad, Mr. Marinos finally yielded, and it was decided that he should go.

At the financier's suggestion, however, Bert was put into the dress of the planter, and armed with pistols and the indispensable machete. A fine saddle-horse was also furnished him from the banker's own well-equipped stable, and early the next morning he and Mr. Swallow, and a single attendant, left the city.

Their course was over the San Antonio bridge to the main island, and along the great military road, that runs from San Juan to Ponce, as far as the town of Roble; then they turned to the east, and by a narrow and winding path pushed steadily forward towards the Cayagua river.

The farther they went the rougher the way became, and the lad soon understood why it was that

his father found it necessary to take two days for the fifty-five miles' journey to the Anvil.

Under ordinary circumstances Bert would have been interested in the strange scenes through which he was passing—the immense ranches, the fine orchards of tropical fruits, the quaint houses, the great forests, the picturesque people. But only one thing now claimed his attention—he was going to his father—every mile passed over was a mile nearer to him—and he thought of his journey only in that light. There would be time enough later on to study the scenes about him.

After fording the Cayagua river, they stopped for dinner; but two hours later were in the saddle and riding to the southeast. All the afternoon the country grew more and more hilly; it was, in fact, first an ascent to some woody height, then a descent into some narrow valley through which a stream of sparkling water ran. There were streams everywhere.

Towards the middle of the afternoon Mr. Swallow suggested that they look well to their pistols, and keep close together.

"The precaution may be entirely unnecessary," he added, "but it is safer, as we are now in a region where the brigands have recently carried on some of their depredations."

For an hour they kept their horses nearly abreast, and soon they reached the brow of the hill, where they caught a glimpse of a small lake, picturesquely shaded by huge palms.

Pointing towards this sheet of water, Mr. Swallow said:

"That is on my ranch, and within a mile of my house. At the foot of this hill is the brook which marks the western boundary of my property. In fifteen minutes we shall be there, and out of all danger."

He rode ahead as he spoke, and, closely followed, first by the lad, and then by the native attendant, dashed down the hill.

At the stream they stopped to allow their horses to drink, and then began to ford the stream.

The next moment there was a clatter of horses' feet behind them, and a half-dozen swarthy men, armed with rifles, pistols and machetes, rode rapidly out from the surrounding forest and down towards them.

"Quick! They are the brigands!" shouted the planter, putting spurs to his horse. His companions followed his example, and the three steeds sprang out of the brook together.

At the same instant, the pursuers raised their rifles and fired. A bullet whistled close to the lad's head, but he was untouched; Mr. Swallow apparently was uninjured also; the native, however, fell back into the stream, dead or severely wounded, while his horse ran wildly on towards his home.

"Come on, lad!" cried the Englishman to Bert, who was looking back at the fallen man; "Pedro is done for, and we must be out of range before those rascals can load again. They won't follow us farther than the edge of this forest."

Side by side the horses dashed; in less than five minutes they were out in the open valley, with the mansion house in full sight; in another five minutes they were at the building.

As they reined in their panting beasts, Mr. Swallow said in Spanish to the crowd of servants who rushed out to meet them:

"Make haste, boys! I'm wounded!"

Then he fell forward on the neck of his horse, and would have rolled to the ground had not a stalwart negro caught him in his arms. He had fainted from the loss of blood.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT EL YUNQUE RANCH.

As the servant caught his master in his arms, he looked inquiringly at the lad, and, for the second time since he had left the States, Bert was thankful he could speak Spanish. His long sojourn with the Cubans had, moreover, rendered him so proficient in the use of the language, he now had no difficulty in explaining to his listeners the exciting adventure through which he and the ranchman had just passed.

As he was talking, there was another arrival. A horseman galloped up the lane, and into the crowd, asking in his native tongue, for he was evidently an islander:

"What is it, boys? The master wounded? Who has done this?"

"It's the gefe-chief," the men explained, stepping back, and allowing him to dismount within a few feet of the young stranger.

To him Bert only said:

"I'm Bert Larkin, son of Captain Larkin, at the El Yunque ranch. I came out from the city with your master. At the brook two miles west of here we were attacked by the bandits, and Mr. Swallow was shot. He is not dead, though, only faint from the loss of blood. He should be attended to at once. I will tell you the rest of my story later."

"You are right," the gefe promptly responded. "Here, boys, bring the master into the house."

Four of the peasants raised the wounded man,

and, led by the overseer, bore him through the broad doorway into a large, spacious sitting-room.

Throwing open a door on the right, the chief disclosed a large bedroom, where he directed the men to lay their unconscious burden down.

"Tell the mistress," he then said to a house-girl, who at that moment appeared from one of the inner rooms of the mansion.

But the man did not wait for Mrs. Swallow to come. Calling Bert to his assistance, he stripped off the Englishman's clothing, and looked for the wound that had already saturated the garments with blood.

He soon found it on the left side, just below the shoulder.

"Good!" he exclaimed, after examining the injury a moment. "Ball entered there," pointing to the back, "and came out here," turning the body so as to reveal the left breast. "Wound is not over an inch or two deep. We shall soon pull him through."

At that instant a woman of singular beauty entered. Her dark face told that she was of either native or Spanish blood—perhaps a mixture. She merely glanced at the young American, and then, dropping to her knees beside the bed, grasped one of the limp hands of the wounded man, asked passionately:

"Is he dead? Oh! do not tell me he is dead!"

"No, señora, only wounded, and not badly at that," replied the gefe. "We will first staunch this blood, and then restore him to consciousness. Quick with the bandages and restoratives! You know where they are. Master always has them ready."

She arose at once from her knees, and went to a closet built into one side of the room. Throwing open the door, she came quickly back with rolls, bandages, and bottles, and then with deft hands

helped to bind up the wounds, and press a cordial between the lips of her husband.

These efforts had the desired effect. The eyes of the man opened, and he said distinctly, though feebly:

"It is nothing, Inez. I shall soon be myself again."

Then noticing Bert, standing a few feet away, he added:

"This young lad is Captain Larkin's son, Inez. He wasn't lost at sea as was feared. I brought him along with me on the way to his father's."

She turned and gave the boy a bright smile. Then she said in excellent English:

"I am so glad for your father! He has been worried greatly about you, but now he'll be happy. I must not forget I am your hostess, however."

She stepped into the parlor, and touched a call-bell that lay on the table. A maid—the same one that had gone to call her mistress—immediately appeared.

"Make ready the guest chamber," she said in Spanish. Then added in English to the waiting boy:

"Sit down in the parlor a few minutes, Mr. Larkin, and excuse me;" then she went back to her husband.

In ten minutes the maid returned, and showed the lad to his room.

"Dinner will be ready in a half-hour," she announced in Spanish, waiting to see if the guest understood her.

"Muy bien, gracias"—very well, thank you—Bert responded, smilingly.

She smiled also; and satisfied that her announcement was intelligible, she disappeared.

Glancing about the apartment, the boy at once felt at home. The furniture was old and massive,

but arranged not unlike a guest chamber in the States, while the bed was clean and comfortable.

"It hardly seems as though I could be in Porto Rico," he murmured, hastening to bathe and dress for the coming meal.

This was abundant, and consisted of soup, roast fowl, vegetables and fruits; but he ate alone, and immediately afterwards retired to his room.

Not to sleep, however. He was now within twenty miles of his father, and should see him on the morrow, unless—in spite of himself he could not help thinking of that unless—unless something had happened to him. For the second time his dream, on the night he left Nassau, came vividly before him. Was it now being realized?

Mr. Swallow's wound doubtless had much to do with his sad forebodings. Had his father fallen a victim to the same gang of depredators? With a stout resolve he determined to know the worst as soon as possible.

It was late when he fell asleep, and he slept late. In fact, the sun was several hours high when he awoke. Dressing, he made his way down to the parlor. His entrance there must have been heard by Mrs. Swallow, for almost immediately the door of her room opened, and she appeared.

Greeting him cordially, she answered his anxious inquiry for her husband's condition by saying:

"He is very comfortable indeed this morning, and wishes to see you after you have eaten your breakfast. I will order it at once."

She returned in five minutes, and led the way herself to the dining-room, where the lad did full justice to the hearty repast placed before him. Then he accompanied her to her husband's bedside.

"Good morning, my lad," Mr. Swallow said, cheerfully, as Bert came in. "I'm here for a few days only, and now which will you do: wait until I

am able to go over to the Anvil with you, as I fully intended before this mishap; or will you go to-day?"

"To-day, if I can find the way," the boy answered promptly.

"Oh! I'll furnish you with a guide—a faithful fellow—who will not leave you until you are safe in your father's hands."

"Then I'll start at once, unless," he added, "I can be of some service to you."

"Not in the least," responded the wounded man; "I'm in good hands," and he looked lovingly at his wife. "I also anticipated your decision, and have the guide and horses at the door. But I have a single word of caution for you: If there is any trouble at the Anvil, and you don't find your father, you had better return here."

"I will," promised the lad, and then, after thanking his kind friend for all he had done for him, he went out to his horse and guide, and was soon on his way.

The road, rougher if anything than the one over which he had come the day before, wound among the hills, and it was impossible to make over four miles an hour. His guide, an old native, who had passed his whole life in that region, was evidently a man of few words. Always attentive to the lad's questions, and watchful to make his journey pleasant, he nevertheless spoke only when spoken to, and then always answered in the briefest way.

At first Bert kept a hand on his pistols, and looked furtively about him as they entered every new forest, but seeing nothing to awaken suspicion, he at length dismissed his fears, and rode, as did his attendant, carelessly on.

At noon they had made scarcely more than eight miles, but stopped for the *siesta* so common in all tropical lands.

After eating the lunch Mrs. Swallow had generously provided, the guide took out his tobacco pouch, and, rolling up a cigarette, settled himself for a smoke. Then he stretched himself in the shade of a huge gum tree, and dropped into a slumber so sound that the lad, impatient to continue their journey, found it difficult to arouse him; and when aroused his invariable reply would be:

"No hurry; go faster when it is cooler."

It was, therefore, certainly three o'clock before the journey was resumed.

Two hours later they came out upon a ridge that gave them a view of the great southern valley, stretching off below the mountain range—of the great anvil-shaped peak itself, that gave the name to the surrounding region—of the broad plains and level meadows so different from the north side of the Luquillos.

Here the guide ventured his first remark without himself being addressed:

"That all your father's hacienda," and his hand swept across the whole panorama before them.

With sparkling eyes Bert took in the beautiful scene, and then he asked:

"How far is it to the mansion?"

"Four miles; good road; come," was the laconic reply, and the man led the way down the decline at the fastest pace they had traveled since leaving Mr. Swallow's ranch.

They were soon able to strike into a brisk canter, and before long were passing through orchards of tropical fruits, past fields of cotton and tobacco, and in sight of nestling hamlets, where women and children hastened into the open air to see the travelers.

In about a half hour they came in sight of the hacienda house—a massive two-story stone building—and five minutes later halted before its door.

A tall, slightly built man, unmistakably a Spaniard, stood on the veranda, and, with a keen glance at the boy, he asked who he was and what he wanted.

For some reason he never could tell why, but a thing he was ever afterwards profoundly thankful for, the lad replied in English :

" I am Bert Larkin, Captain Larkin's son. Are you his overseer ? "

Instead of answering directly, the man put a silver whistle to his lips, and gave a shrill blast. A negro answered the call, to whom the man said in Spanish :

" Take the horses to the corral, and the attendant to the kitchen."

Then he said to his visitor in broken English :

" Come ! I talk to you."

Dismounting, the lad with some misgiving followed the man into the house. He led the way to a room in the north end, evidently fitted up for an office, and, pointing to a chair, uttered the one word :

" Seat."

Bert sat down, watching the man closely, whom he thought toyed too incessantly with the handle of the machete in his belt. Civil as the fellow was, somehow he could not help distrusting him.

The Spaniard now opened a drawer in the office table, and taking out some papers, pushed them towards the lad, asking :

" Read Spanish ? "

There was a subtle look in the man's eye that led the boy to suspect this was a test—the fellow was trying to find out if his caller understood Spanish. Would it not be just as well to have him think he did not understand the language ? This question flashed through the lad's mind, and remembering he had never read a line in any Spanish book, he answered unhesitatingly :

" No."

He thought a look of relief passed over the Spaniard's face, but if so it was quickly concealed. Then the fellow declared, boldly :

"Buy ranch ! Those papers !"

Bert took the documents into his hand, and glanced them over. He could here and there make out a word, and recognized that they were legal writings of some kind, but that they could not be what the man claimed he felt sure, *for his father's signature was not on them.*

He at once decided that there was some deep-laid scheme to get possession of his father's property, but, in hopes of getting at the bottom of the treachery and also ascertaining what had become of his father and Mr. Barnes, he handed the papers back to the man, with no trace of distrust on his face, asking :

"How long ago ? Where is father and Mr. Barnes ?"

The Spaniard either could understand English better than he could speak it, or else surmised what the boy was asking, for he quickly replied :

"Two weeks ! Gone to San Juan !"

"No," responded Bert with a decisive shake of his head, "I came from there."

The man held up his hands in astonishment.

"No there !" he cried ; then suddenly : "Pay cash ; brigands got them."

But for the fact that his father's name was not on the papers, the boy might have believed the Spaniard was honest in his suggestion, so real was his acting.

"What shall I do ?" asked the lad in apparent dismay, on his side becoming an actor also.

He deceived the man, if the man did not deceive him.

"Do !" the fellow echoed, leaping to his feet, and drawing his knife from his belt—"Wait ! Mor-

row—men—hunt—so," and he made a furious gesture of cutting an adversary's throat.

His tones were fierce—his pantomine was perfect—an unsuspicious observer would have thought him the embodiment of a righteous indignation, ready to avenge the captain's disappearance.

In a few minutes he grew calmer.

"Tired? Hungry?" he asked.

Bert nodded affirmatively, hoping to gain time to think over the situation, and to decide what it was best for him to do.

The Spaniard rang a bell; the same negro who had taken the horses appeared. To him the man said in Spanish, and Bert, without appearing to do so, caught every word:

"Is the room ready, Jago?"

"Si, señor."

"Fixed just as I ordered it?"

"Si, señor."

"Show this young man to it."

Then to his guest he said in his brief English:

"Room! Dinner! hour!" all of which the lad understood to mean that he was to be shown to his room first, and that dinner would be served in an hour.

Uncertain as to what might be in store for him, and yet not wishing to give the Spaniard any reason to believe his honesty was suspected, Bert arose promptly and followed the servant from the office.

He was led along a broad hall, and up a wide stairway, to a chamber evidently directly over the room he had just left, where the servant threw open a door, and made a sign for him to enter.

For a moment the boy hesitated, fearing he was to be made a prisoner. But the next movement of the negro completely dispelled that fear. Having pointed out the room, the fellow, without himself

entering it, turned and went back down-stairs, leaving the guest to come and go as he pleased.

"Can I have misjudged the Spaniard?" thought the lad as he now entered the comfortably furnished chamber, finding not only all his baggage there, but every arrangement for a luxurious bath.

He thought the matter over as he washed and redressed, and finally concluded:

"The Spaniard thinks he has completely deceived me, and will doubtless to-morrow carry out the farce of pretending to hunt father up. Well, I'll let him do so, but keep my eyes and ears ready to see and hear any and everything that will give me light on this mysterious affair. There must be some of these people about here who know and will tell me the truth."

Scarcely had he come to this conclusion when a bell rang below, and believing that it was a summons to the table, he stopped only long enough to slip one of his revolvers into his hip-pocket, and then hastened down-stairs.

The Spaniard met him in the hallway, and conducted him to a room in the rear of the house, where there was a well-spread table. Over this the host himself presided, and no one came near him and his guest while they were eating.

During the meal the man said little, and at its close made a motion, which meant as plainly as words could have done:

"Will you go to the office or back to your room?"

"I will go to my room," said Bert, anxious to be alone and think over some plan by which he could get at the very heart-secrets of a man whom he believed to be a rascally schemer.

He did not notice the sudden glitter in the Spaniard's eye, and went up to his chamber wholly unconscious of the trap into which he was falling.

It was already dark, and a light shone brightly from a lamp on the table as he entered his room. Closing the door after him, he dropped into a rocker near the bed and gave himself up to serious thought.

So engrossed was he that he did not hear a light step in the upper hallway, and not until a sharp click sounded in the lock did he spring up in alarm.

In a second he was at the door, and had seized the latch; but he was too late. The door was fastened; and a hurried examination of the room disclosed two other facts: the shutters of the windows were all closed and tightly secured from without; and his machete and pistol, which he had foolishly left in the room while he went to supper, had been removed.

Beyond all question he was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XX.

A DIABOLICAL PLOT.

In order to understand what had happened at the Anvil before Bert arrived there we must go back a few years in our story, and explain a matter which Mr. Barnes in his narrative of the captain's experiences had not thought of sufficient consequence even to mention.

It was not then; but within a few months had become an important factor in our tale.

When the old Spanish Don died, leaving the island ranch to Captain Larkin, there was a distant branch of his family still living in Spain, which by the law of primogeniture succeeded to all of his property in that country.

This property, however, was meager beside that which he possessed in Porto Rico, and it was not the intention of the head of the Spanish branch of the family to lose the magnificent ranch in that island unless compelled to do so. An investigation was set on foot immediately to test the validity of Captain Larkin's claim to the vast estate.

At that time, however, it was little more than an examination into the soundness and legality of his title. For the agent sent out to the island returned with the tidings that the plantation, instead of being willed to the American captain, had, for a specified consideration received to Don Maximo's full satisfaction, been transferred by deed, and duly recorded in accordance with the laws of the island, prior to the old Spaniard's death. There could, therefore, be

no disputing of Captain Larkin's right to the property.

There the matter rested so far as the inheritor of the Spanish estates was concerned.

But this man—Don Pedro Buvinez—had one child—a daughter—already married to a haughty but impoverished noble, named Don José Sardinas, who was in every way as unscrupulous as he was poor and proud.

He nurtured a bitter hatred against the man who held what he termed his own rightful possessions, and only waited for the death of his father in-law to make an attempt to obtain the property, or, failing in this, to revenge himself on the man who had (as he viewed it) wronged him.

About the time Mr. Barnes sailed for the States to ascertain if Bert was living, the death of Don Pedro occurred, and the son-in-law immediately began his preparations to visit Porto Rico, and carry out the purpose he had cherished so long; and it happened that he landed in San Juan the very week Captain Larkin came up to that city to meet the old sailor and the boy whom he had as yet never seen.

As now known, three of the boats that left the side of the ill-fated Alhambra reached Cat Island, in the Bahama group, and the news of the sad disaster was soon heralded all over the world.

The sorrowful tidings reached the captain on the day he expected to clasp his son in his arms, and with an anxious heart he waited to obtain news from the fourth and last boat that was supposed to have also cleared from the sinking steamer.

Day after day passed; no news came; and finally it was the generally accepted theory that the unfortunate vessel had gone down before the yawl had been launched, and, therefore, all others on board—Jack and the lad included—had been lost.

Reluctantly accepting this view at last, Captain Larkin, looking older by many years than he really was, because of this sudden grief, prepared to return to the Anvil.

Calling at his bankers, at their request, the day before his departure from the city, he was introduced to a stranger, who proved to be Don José Sardinas, the Spanish representative of the old Don's family.

This man— as we have seen—had now been in San Juan some days; he had also called a number of times on Mr. Marinos, who, knowing nothing of the fellow's real purpose in visiting the island, received him cordially for the old Don's sake. During one of these interviews the banker had incidentally mentioned the sad loss of Captain Larkin's only child.

The innocent bit of news filled the scheming Spaniard with delight. He saw in this unexpected happening an evidence that things were slowly shaping themselves for his purpose; and believed it all the more when the captain himself came into the office, bowed and aged by his great sorrow. With the devilish cunning of which he was a perfect master, he immediately decided on a bold move towards the fruition of his scheme.

Greeting the captain with marked suavity, he represented himself as having run over to the island partly for the pleasure of the trip, and partly for the sake of visiting the old estate of his wife's grand uncle.

Learning the captain was in the city, he had ventured to arrange for this meeting, and hoped, ere his return home, to have the great felicity of calling at the plantation for a brief inspection of it.

The captain, looking through the glasses of his own honesty and integrity, saw nothing out of the way in the man's proposal, and heartily invited him

to accompany him down to the ranch for an extended visit.

This invitation was promptly accepted, and three days later the Spaniard was installed in the hacienda house as the captain's guest.

It drew the captain's attention largely from his recent affliction to show his visitor over the estate. This, as is already known to the reader, had under the present owner's sagacity and enterprise been brought to a condition that made it one of the finest plantations in the island. Every new aspect of its resources and value, therefore, only caused the loss of it to rankle deeper and deeper in the observer's heart, and led him to resolve more and more, by fair means or by foul, to come into possession of it.

Finding that the captain missed greatly the services of his old overseer, Mr. Barnes, and was not himself able to attend to many of the details of the ranch calling for prompt attention, the Don, by another bold stroke of policy, but under the plea of learning how to manage such an estate, offered to assist his host.

The captain, who regarded the offer as genuine, not only thankfully accepted of it, but generously insisted upon the Spaniard's receiving a handsome salary for his services; and within a few weeks the guest actually became the overseer of the property.

The wily Don's first move was to arouse the enmity of the peasants on the estate against the present owner, but soon found that this was impossible. No employer had ever been kinder or more liberal with his employees; they knew it, and for the most part were devoted to their American master.

The exception was a few lawless fellows, whose own misdoing had brought them into ill-repute; and with these the Spaniard stealthily became friendly, planning to use them later for his own evil purposes.

He had been overseer at the Anvil but a few

weeks when three circumstances combined to develop his plan of operations.

The three circumstances were: first, a cablegram from Mr. Barnes at Cape Town, Africa, announcing his safety, and his return as soon as possible to the island; second, the constantly growing possibilities of a war between Spain and the United States; and third, the assigning to the nearest military station —that of Humacao—as commanding officer, the Don's own cousin, a man as unscrupulous as himself.

Don José, as soon as he learned that his relative had assumed his position in the near-by town, sought an interview with him, and there in the privacy of that Spanish fort was concocted as diabolical a plot as was ever formed against innocent and unsuspecting men. In brief it was as follows:

Don José, in order that he and his colleague might have some instruments for their nefarious work as soon as the time was ripe for it, was to organize, secretly of course, the lawless fellows he had found in the mountain region into a regular band of plunderers, whose headquarters were to be somewhere in the recesses of the Luguillo range, and who were to make themselves notorious by their raids on the surrounding community. If complaint was made to the military governor, he, though seemingly zealous to hunt them down, was never to find them.

On the arrival of Mr. Barnes, the Don was to resign promptly his position of overseer, on the laudable plea that, as he was now no longer needed at the Anvil, he should look about the island for some plantation he could purchase for himself. His real withdrawal, however, was to be simply to the bandit rendezvous in the mountains, where he could keep a constant watch over the movements of Captain Larkin and his agent.

A third step in the plan was that, as soon as the

declaration of hostilities between the nations seemed imminent, the Don should suddenly appear at the Anvil, and make a bold and generous offer for the ranch on the double pretext, that he had found no plantation he liked so well, and thought also that its present owner, owing to the prospect of a war, would prefer to sell out, and return to his own country.

While the fourth and last step was, whether the offer to purchase the ranch was accepted or not, that the Americans should be quietly put out of the way, and, with their disappearance, the consummation of the purchase publicly announced.

Of course the murderous work was to be done by the band of robbers, and when they had served their purpose, they were to be hunted down and killed by the Spanish soldiers at the order of their commander, who now apparently awoke to his real duty as the military governor and protector of the district. So every trace of the crime was to be swept out of the way, and the two schemers were to divide between themselves the vast and valuable estate.

The first and second steps of this scheme were successfully carried out. Early in April the condition of things at Madrid seemed to warrant the third step, and Don José, who had not been seen in that locality for several months, now appeared, and offered Captain Larkin a generous sum for the Anvil property. This proposition was, as he really expected it would be, declined; but it did not prevent his creating among the gefes of the estate the impression that the plantation might be sold in case war was actually declared; and this was really all the plotter desired to accomplish by his offer.

Things were now ripe for the final move, and everything worked apparently to the advantage of the schemers.

War was declared the last of the month; the

American consuls left their posts; many citizens of the States, doing business in the island, thought it wiser to sail immediately for home; the enmity between the Spanish element in the isle and the few Americans that remained was fanned to a white heat; the crime contemplated could now be easily carried out, and every trace of it lost.

Late on the evening of May 1st, the wily Spaniard again appeared at the Anvil ranch. To the district chiefs, as he rode through the plantation, he announced that Captain Larkin had at last decided to dispose of the property, and on the morrow would leave for San Juan to complete the details of the sale.

In the mansion house he told quite another story. It was that Mr. Swallow, over the range, had consented to sell his plantation, and desired the captain and his overseer to come over there on the following day to inventory the property.

The unsuspecting gentlemen, though surprised at this sudden freak on the part of their neighbor, readily consented to render him the service asked, and the next morning rode away in the company of the Don.

It certainly seemed a mutual misfortune when the trio, while in the heart of the mountains, were suddenly surrounded by the bandit horde, and all carried off as captives; nevertheless four days later Don José returned to the ranch, called together the gefes, and exhibiting his papers (which, however, never left his own land), proclaimed himself the new owner of the magnificent property.

But there was to be a factor in the way of the completion of the scheme that he had not accounted for. Within an hour of his own coming, there arrived a messenger from San Juan, bringing a despatch for the captain from his bankers.

Receiving the man alone, the Spaniard explained that Captain Larkin and his agent had both been

called to Humacao, leaving him in charge of the ranch; and then he opened the missive. It was the cablegram from Bert announcing his rescue and speedy arrival at the island.

Forced to act quickly, the plotter decided that it was for his interest that the messenger should not return to his home; and he therefore detained the fellow long enough the following day to enable him to communicate with his robber band. Then the man was permitted to depart, but never reached San Juan!

From that hour, too, the road between the capital city and the mountains was kept under a constant surveillance by the brigands, at the instigation of their leader; and the attack on the party of Mr. Swallow was in reality an attempt to kill the boy who accompanied him.

The safe arrival of the lad at the Anvil on the next evening was due to the sagacity of Mr. Swallow, who had directed the guide to take the boy directly over the mountain range, instead of by the more circuitous but usual way of travel between the plantations. So he escaped the men who were watching for him.

But even this possibility had been provided for, and, as we have already seen, Bert fell into the trap set for him, and was soon a prisoner, at the mercy of a man who would stop at nothing in order to accomplish his purpose.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT BERT OVERHEARD.

Having become satisfied that he was really a prisoner, Bert decided to accept the fact as philosophically as possible.

"If I cannot get out, no one shall get in without my knowledge," he decided, then he looked about the chamber for something to barricade the door.

In one corner of the room was a huge chest, made of mahogany wood, and so heavy he could scarcely lift one end of it. It had no lock, and as he approached it a curiosity seized the lad to see what was within it. Raising the lid, therefore, he examined the contents.

There were clothing, books, papers, and a cork-life-jacket, so like the one in his own luggage the boy knew at once whose property he was beholding. It belonged to the old sailor, and this was doubtless the room he occupied when at the ranch.

This discovery gave Bert a home feeling he had not before possessed, and did more than comfort his heart.

"I am where I have a right to be," he thought. "This house is father's, if he is still living; if not, it is mine. This estate is mine; and no man or men shall deprive me of what is lawfully mine," and with the thought he nerved himself to meet and overcome whatever he might be called to encounter.

His examination finished, he drew the chest slowly and carefully along until it was against the

door. But not yet satisfied with his barricade he pushed the heavy bedstead over against the chest, so that the head-board completely covered the entrance, and then smiled complacently. No one could enter there without his knowing of it in time to defend himself.

Then he turned his attention to the windows. There were no sashes or glass—a light screen-work taking the place of those furnishings so indispensable in a colder climate; while outside the screens were the shutters of heavy plank, and, though now fastened without, they were originally arranged so as to be secured firmly from within. The fastenings were, moreover, still in their place, and going, therefore, to each window in turn—there were four of them—Bert bolted them down in so solid a manner they could not be opened except with a force and noise "sufficient," as he facetiously termed it, "to awaken the dead."

One other operation completed his arrangements for the night. Placing a small stand beside the bed, he laid his revolver upon it within reach of his hand, and then, without undressing, threw himself upon the couch, and slept soundly.

The night passed without any disturbance, and the sun was peeping through the cracks of the closed shutters when he awoke. Arising he first performed his morning ablutions, and then removed his barricade from the door.

As he finished this task there was the tramp of a horse's feet in front of the house, and he went over to the window nearest the sound and tried to look out. By pressing the shutter slightly he obtained an opening that enabled him to see the horse, which his guide of the day before had ridden, brought around to the door. A moment later the guide himself appeared from the rear of the building, and sprang into the saddle.

He did not, however, immediately ride away, but seemed to be waiting for something or some one.

Five minutes passed; then the Spaniard came out of the house and handed the waiting man a letter, saying, as he did so:

"I am in charge here now, and that letter will explain everything to your master. It also tells him I will now look out for the boy, and send him to his father," and with a flourish of his hand he indicated that the fellow was to depart. The next moment both horse and rider had passed out from the watching lad's limited vision.

It was, perhaps, a half-hour later when there were steps in the upper hallway, followed by a knock at the door; then the voice of the Don himself said:

"Breakfast, Señor Larkin."

"Yes, sir," Bert replied quickly dropping his pistol into his jacket pocket, and keeping one hand on its stock, alert for whatever might now transpire.

The door was immediately unlocked and thrown wide open, and in the opening stood the Spaniard, smiling and bowing politely; but back of him stood two powerful men, with drawn machetes in their right hands, and cocked pistols in their left, ready for instant use. The outlook for a defense under the circumstances was, certainly, not very reassuring.

"Pistol!" demanded the Spaniard, pointing to the pocket in which the lad still kept his right hand.

Bert understood what he meant; the absence of the revolver from the belt, which had been taken from the chamber the night before, was discovered, and the Don wanted it.

Much as the boy hated to comply with the request he saw no way to get out from it, and with evident reluctance passed the weapon over.

The man received it with thanks, and then uttered

the one word : " Come ! " at the same time beckoning his prisoner to follow him.

Bert obeyed, and the two guards stepped quickly in behind them.

Their journey was simply to the dining-room, where an excellent breakfast was served, the host all attention to the needs of his guest, and but for the presence of the armed men, the lad would have thought his imprisonment a dream.

When the meal was over the Don indicated by pointing to the hands of his watch that the boy could have a half-hour in the open air attended by the sentinels, and then must return to his room.

Thankful for the respite from the close air of the chamber the lad walked up and down in front of the mansion until his alloted time had passed, and then went quietly back up-stairs. And it may as well be said here as elsewhere that so long as Bert remained at the ranch this order of things was repeated at each meal-time unless Don José was away. Then his food was served him in his cell, as he soon called the place of his confinement, and always with two armed men in attendance. He had reason to believe also that the house was never left without a strong guard.

Day after day passed. The prisoner could often hear the Spaniard in the office beneath him, and occasionally caught the murmur of voices as he talked with his men or his visitors. Anxious to know what was going on, and especially to hear what was being said, the boy soon devised a way to gratify both desires.

He remembered that the ceiling of the office was of boards, and so was the floor of his room. Why not then cut a hole through, large on the upper and small on the under side, so as to give him a view of, and enable him to hear what was said in, the office? The clasp-knife, which had been in his constant

possession since his shipwreck, was still in his pocket, and the task with so fine a blade could not be impossible.

The more he thought of the idea, the more eager he became to carry it out ; and on the second day of his imprisonment the work was begun.

Cutting away only at such times as he knew the office had no occupant, and carefully concealing the chips in the bottom of the great chest, and covering the hole itself with a large rug that was in the room, he in three days had completed his task.

The opening in the floor of his room was large enough to allow him to put his head through it, and he had removed the piece of boarding in such a way that it could be replaced when the hole was not in use.

The opening in the cedar ceiling was an inch in diameter at its beginning, but scarcely larger than a pin head at its termination—that it might not be detected from below. Yet by placing an eye at the aperture a fair view of the office could be obtained ; and by placing the ear there all conversation carried on below could be distinctly heard.

Several days passed before Bert obtained any information through the hole that was of any special value to him ; but on the evening of his tenth day at the ranch he heard a conversation through the aperture that more than repaid him for all the labor he had performed.

Just at night there came to his ears the sound of many horses' feet. Jumping from the bed on which he at that time was lying, he hurried to the window, and looked out through the widest crack of its shutter. All he could see was armed men in uniform dismounting at the door, but from what he later heard he ascertained that a Spanish cavalcade, under command of a colonel, had arrived from Humacao. The men must have bivouacked under the

surrounding palms, but the officer was domiciled with Don José as his guest; and after supper they were closeted in the office for a long, and, to the listening lad, a most important conversation. Some of which we will record here:

"You were a long time coming, Carlos," the Don began, when he and his visitor had lighted their cigarettes.

"I came as soon as I could," answered the other, curtly. "I was in San Juan when your messenger arrived at the fort—was called there and reprimanded, too, for not suppressing your cursed bandits. The trouble grew out of your attacking that Englishman over the mountain. He complained to his consul, and the consul went before the Captain-General demanding reparation. I've got to squelch the rascals soon, or lose my command. That is why I have fifty men with me; and yet you tell me I can't hunt them down now?"

"No," replied his host, gloomily; "and all because Larkin hasn't and won't sign those papers. Neither one of us can imitate his handwriting well enough to answer our purpose, and we must force him to write his name, or all our work is lost."

"But you told him he should die, if he didn't give us his signature?"

"Yes, but he quietly retorted, that in all probability he should die anyway, and he preferred to die without making the property over to us."

"Plucky, isn't he?" remarked the colonel, with something like admiration in his tones. "I wonder if all those Americans are such brave fellows! I have told you how their Admiral smashed our fleet at Manila, without losing a man; and they are now after Cervera's flotilla. Should they serve him the same way what can our nation do? Cuba, this island, all our colonies will become theirs. I tell you we are in no condition to fight them; as sure

as they send an army here they'll win. The natives are ready to receive them with open arms now."

"I know it," Don José responded; "and that is why I am insisting on a straight-deed of this property from the captain. Nothing else will stand the test under American rule, and what you and I want to do is to be prepared even for that emergency. We don't want the ranch taken from us and turned over to the American heirs, just as we have it within our grasp."

"And ourselves strung up for a pair of precious rascals," chimed in the officer, with a laugh. "But, José, what is this new factor in our little game, you alluded to it in your message?"

"The captain's son has turned up," the host replied, telling the story of Bert's coming, and then adding:

"He's shut up now in the room above us. What shall we do with him?"

"Can't he hear what we are saying?" asked the soldier, apprehensively.

"It would make no difference if he did," laughed the other; "he doesn't know a word of Spanish. I've had a hard time talking with him, though you know I picked up some English while with the captain."

His companion assented, and then there was a silence for some time—long enough for the listening boy to raise his head from its uncomfortable position and rub the back of his strained neck. As he did so, a great joy was welling up in his heart, and he murmured softly: "Father is alive! All I've got to do is to find him."

The conversation was now resumed, and the lad placed his other ear to the aperture, thus relieving himself in a measure from his former cramped position.

"I have it," the colonel was saying; "it is certain

that we have got to reach the captain in some other way than through himself—why not then through this boy? Does his father know he is alive and here?"

"No," admitted his comrade.

"Well, we can make two hits at one stroke," went on the officer. "You can help me out of a bad scrape, and force the captain to do our bidding."

"Explain yourself," said the other.

"I'll take the boy down to Humacao as one of the brigands whom I have captured; we'll try him, condemn him, and report him to headquarters. That will restore me to favor there, and keep them quiet for at least a month longer, especially if your band makes no more raids."

"Then we'll have the lad write a note to his father establishing his identity, and send it along with a copy of the official death-warrant to the captain, so he can see what a fix his son is in. Finally, we will offer to free the lad, the captain, and Barnes, and give them a safe departure, from the island for the captain's signature. When he knows his child's life is at stake, he'll give in surely."

"But will you allow them to go?" questioned Don José, incredulously.

"Of course not," retorted the colonel, coolly; "what is one more lie to the wickedness you and I have already committed? We'll snap off the heads of the three Americans as if they were centipedes; wipe out the bandits by a single stroke, and enjoy the fruits of our labor whether the home government wins or loses."

"Excellent!" cried his fellow-plotter, admiringly. "But you may as well have several prisoners as one. It will all aid in keeping the authorities at San Juan quiet. I have two men in custody—messengers from the captain's bankers—that can be spared as well as not. I'll send up to the rendezvous

to-morrow for them, and have four of the band escort them down. You can place your men so as to capture all six, and run them into Humacao with the boy. Seven of the gang at one haul ought certainly to satisfy the Captain-General himself that you are doing your best to disperse the marauders; then, if there are no further raids for some weeks—and I will take care there are none—we can, without danger of interference, perfect our scheme."

"Do you know, Cousin José, I really believe, take us together, there never were such a pair of villains in this island before," said the officer, rolling up a fresh cigarette.

The rest of their conversation for the evening was devoted to the details of the plan already formed. Bert listened long enough to ascertain that his transfer to the fortress at Humacao would not take place under two days, in order to allow the soldiers ample time to secure the other prisoners; and to know that, after his arrival at the city, his trial, along with the other men, would be allowed to proceed in the regular way—the plotters deeming it safer to follow this course. He then left the aperture, and, throwing himself on the bed, thought over the situation.

There was little chance of escaping from such a body of soldiers. But would he not in the court have an opportunity to establish his innocency? Nay, more—could he not tell there a story, which, sustained by such witnesses as Mr. Marinos, Mr. Ralston, and Mr. Swallow, would not only free himself, but lead also to the deliverance of his father and Mr. Barnes?

The lad's idea of a court was, of course, based upon what little he knew of such affairs in his own land, and, believing that he would have an opportunity to expose the schemers in the coming trial, he was not only willing but eager to meet it.

But he miscalculated Spanish justice, or rather injustice; the trial was a farce—the mere arraignment of the prisoners in a bunch before Colonel Luzares himself, as the military governor of the district, and his condemnation of them without a hearing; then the forwarding of this decision to the authorities at the capital, who, anxious to rid themselves of a band of men that were causing them a great deal of trouble, promptly returned the findings of the court properly indorsed—so thirty days later Bert found himself tried, condemned, and sentenced to be shot on July 25th, together with the men who had been brought into the city with him, and of whom two were as innocent of crime as himself.

Up to this time the boy had occupied a cell in common with his fellow-prisoners, but was now transferred to a smaller apartment in the eastern end of the fortification, and near, as it soon proved, the colonel's own quarters.

On the day following the transfer the commander, accompanied by an interpreter (for he still supposed the lad did not understand Spanish), visited his young prisoner. Blandly informing the boy that his life was now in his hands, he directed him to write a note to his father, acquainting him of the unfortunate situation, and requesting him to do all he could to save him.

"What good will it do me?" asked Bert, directly in Spanish.

The officer stared at the youth a moment as though he doubted his identity, and then said:

"It will save your life, and that of your father."

"But I heard you tell Don José," retorted the lad coolly, and perhaps imprudently, "that after father had signed that deed all three Americans were to be murdered; and knowing what I do from your inhuman trial of innocent men, I can fully believe it."

The fury of the man was that of a wild beast.

Grasping his prisoner by the shoulder, he hurled him back against the wall with a force that nearly knocked the breath out of him.

"What else do you know, you young rascal? You speak Spanish as well as I do, and evidently have overheard altogether too much for your own good."

"I know enough of the diabolical scheme you and Don José are trying to carry out to hang you both," responded the lad without flinching, and glancing at the interpreter, who stood stolidly at the entrance of the cell.

The colonel saw the glance, and recognizing for the first time that there was a witness to the interview, he laughed, saying carelessly: "You dreamed it, boy." Then to the man he added sternly:

"It seems your services are not needed here; you may go, and mark you, say nothing of what you have heard here, if you value your life."

The fellow, apparently cowered by the stern command, slunk out of the door and down the corridor, leaving the officer and prisoner alone.

"I shall be glad to write my father, Colonel Luzares," Bert now said with dignity; "but I must write what I please, and then leave him to decide for himself about signing your papers."

Under the existing circumstances this was a heroic speech, but the heroism displayed won the day.

"Write whatever you desire," the officer replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Little can I tell what it is, and Don José would not make it out much better. It may be just as well, too, for your father to know the whole matter."

"Very well; send me the paper, and I will write at once," the boy promised.

The colonel, bowing politely, withdrew, and ten minutes thereafter an orderly, about Bert's own age and size, came to the door bringing pens, ink and

paper. Thanking him for the articles, the lad began the letter.

It was a long one, beginning with the sinking of the Alhambra, and telling of his experiences to the moment of his writing, concluding:

"You already know, father, what will be demanded of you, and I want you to act as seems to you wisest in the light of what I have told you. Of Don José I have no hopes. He is a man who would put even Colonel Luzares out of the way to accomplish his purpose. But in the colonel I have more confidence, and wish you might communicate with him direct, though that may be impossible.

"And now, should we never see each other in this world, and no other communication allowed between us, I want to tell you that, with death before us, I am glad I came here to share it with you. Love to yourself and Mr. Barnes. Good-by!

"Your own boy,
"BERT."

The officer came himself for the manuscript, and made no comment at its length when it was delivered to him.

"I shall send it to your father to-day," he simply remarked as he left the cell, "and he will be allowed several days to come to a decision. But in about a week we should know the issue."

He may not have intended to comfort the lad, or awaken any hope in his heart; but somehow he did.

"A week!" the boy repeated to himself when alone; "a whole week! Much may happen in that time to prevent those rascals from carrying out their purpose!"

He was right; but he little knew in what way the deliverance was to come, or the thrilling experiences he was to meet with before it was fully accomplished.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BOLD MOVE.

Felipe Peregrino, the man whom Colonel Luzares brought into Bert Larkin's cell to act as interpreter, was an old sailor who for several years had lived at Humacao, supporting himself and family by serving in the courts and among shipmasters and merchants as an oral translator. There was scarcely a country he had not been in, and remained long enough to learn its vernacular—at least enough of it to make himself intelligible in that tongue.

"Find old Felipe, and he'll talk with the stranger, unless he's from the moon," was a current saying in the commercial circles of the island city where he dwelt.

But the old man was not only a linguist; he was keen and shrewd, faithful to his friends, bitter towards his enemies, and in common with all the native islanders had little love for the Spaniards.

When, therefore, he, while in the cell, seemed to be stolidly indifferent to the conversation between the angry officer and his young prisoner, he was really listening intently to every word; and though he departed apparently cowering under the stern command of the colonel, that, too, was only pretense.

Once in the corridor, his attitude instantly changed; he stood erect, his eyes flashed with a sudden light, and he acted like a man who had resolved upon a definite and resolute purpose. Glancing down the passage, he saw the guard was

at the extreme end of his beat, and so, unnoticed, stepped quickly back near the cell door, where he heard all that passed between the commander and the imprisoned lad. But the officer found him a few minutes later standing meekly at the door of his quarters, waiting for the usual fee he received for his services.

The colonel, however, took an entirely different view of the matter.

"You have rendered no service," he declared; "leave the fort before I have the soldiers throw you out."

He was promptly obeyed, but there was a menace in every step the departing man took, and when beyond the limits of the fortress, he turned and looked back at the structure as though measuring every angle and nook and corner. Finally he went on muttering:

"It is now your day, Colonel Luzares, but mine is at hand. Old Felipe knows a thing or two you little dream of."

On the following morning the old interpreter was not to be found in his usual haunts, but lay beneath a huge gum tree a mile out of the city, and in a position which gave him a full view of the road leading towards the Luguillo Mountains.

One hour, two hours passed, and though he smoked his cigarettes in the indolent, unhurried manner of the true islander, he was really alert, and not a single traveler left the city or came along the road without his closest scrutiny.

By and by his patience was rewarded, and a horseman, wearing the uniform of the Spanish soldier, came out of the town, and rode rapidly up the highway towards him. It was evidently the person the interpreter was looking for; springing to his feet he sauntered down the road so as to intercept him.

As they met, he saluted the rider, and exclaimed:

"Good morning, Benito, you are out early to-day, and must have a long journey before you."

"Yes, Uncle Felipe," the orderly returned; "the colonel has sent me up to the Anvil with a message."

"That is Captain Larkin's place, isn't it?" he asked, innocently.

"It was, but Don José Sardinas has bought it, and it is to him I carry the letter."

"How long since?" the interpreter questioned in well-feigned surprise.

"Two months or more," responded the horseman; "at least the Don was in possession when we made the raid on the bandits."

"That young American I was called to see yesterday is a queer one," the old man went on confidentially. "The colonel supposed he couldn't talk Spanish, and he knew it as well as you or I. Do you think of his name?"

No one would have thought the inquirer took the slightest interest in the answer, and yet he waited eagerly, almost impatiently, for it.

"I heard the roll called at the trial," the orderly answered, "and it was put down as Bertanni Larkinos. What would that be in English?"

"Bert Larkin," replied the interpreter promptly. Then he ventured to become even more confidential with his companion. "I think, Benito, he is Captain Larkin's son, and that there is some conspiracy against him and his father. The lad accused the colonel of it yesterday."

The orderly looked about him. He and Felipe were alone. Lowering his voice he said:

"I don't know but you are right, uncle; there is something strange about this matter. The young American wasn't captured by the troops, but was already a prisoner in Don José's house. We all thought the Don had caught him a few days before, and then turned him over to the colonel. Of course

it might have been so; but I like the lad,—he's a brave fellow—not a complaint out of him—and I can't bear to see him die."

"You have a kind heart, Benito, like your mother and aunt, my wife. Neither can bear to see even a chicken die. But, lad, keep your eyes open, and on your return report to me. I owe too much to Captain Larkin to see him or his son in trouble and not help.

"Then, Benito, our island will soon be in the hands of the Americans. You know how Cervera's fleet was sunk as so many cockle shells but a few days ago. Santiago de Cuba is reported as fallen. An army of invasion will soon be here, and the people are ready to receive them with open arms. Though your father was a Spaniard, lad, your mother is an islander; you were born here, and your true place is to stand with the Americans."

The orderly's cheeks flushed. "I cannot be dishonorable, Uncle Felipe," he said; "you have yourself taught me to be true to duty; but if there is conspiracy—and the colonel and Don José are villains—that is different. You can count on me. But I must be on my way. *Buenos dias, señor;*" and he galloped off up the road.

"I can depend on him," the old man muttered, looking after the disappearing horseman; "now for the other side of this affair. The young prisoner is surely Captain Larkin's son—his name proves it—and there is some deviltry to pay between the colonel and that Don José. But I'll ferret it out as sure as I am Felipe Peregrino. But how? that's the question," and he went back towards the city in deep thought.

Five days and five nights passed. No one came near Bert except his guards, and they only when in the regular discharge of their duties. Yet he was in no sense despondent.

It may be he was confident that the father he had never seen would, now that he knew all about the plot, find some way to outwit the perpetrators. Possibly his faith went higher and rested in Him who is a shield and a refuge to the innocent and guiltless. Whatever the cause, he was serene and hopeful.

On the fifth night he was awakened by what seemed to be sounds of digging near one corner of his cell. So distinct and regular was the noise he jumped from his rude bed, went over to that part of the room, and, putting his head close to the stone floor, listened intently. There was doubt as to the fact, but in the attitude he now was, the sounds seemed farther away, and beyond the wall of his apartment. Could it be some prisoner was tunneling his way out of the fort?

The lad had read of such things, and with a determination that, as soon as it was light, he would examine his own cell with a view to such an attempt, he went back to his pallet of straw.

When he again awoke the noise had ceased; but he did not forget his resolve, and, after a scanty breakfast, began his investigations.

The room was about ten by twelve feet in size. The north side opened upon the corridor; the east was a part of the outer wall of the fort, and high up from the floor was the narrow opening through which came the fresh air that made the cell endurable; the south and west sides were, as the boy then believed, the partitions between his own and other cells. All these walls were of solid stone, tightly cemented together, and there seemed no probability of working a passage through any of them.

He, therefore, turned his attention to the floor; this, as previously intimated, was formed from stone flagging or slabs, about three feet long and eighteen inches wide. Of their thickness he could not judge

until he had worked out the cement between two of them; and this he decided should be his first task.

It was over in the southwest corner of the cell that he had heard the sound of digging the previous night, and here he made a close examination of the slab. It could not be removed as the partition wall rested upon it in part; and this was true of the whole row of flagging down the west side of the room.

Satisfied he could do nothing with that course of slabs, Bert examined the second row, two feet and a half out from the partition. The first stone was firmly secured by the wall of the south side; but the second stone, sixteen inches from the south wall, and two feet six inches from the west wall, was clear of all obstruction, and when the cement was once dug out ought to be easily removed. He marked it, therefore, as the place for his attack.

Impatiently he waited for the night, and when all chance of detection from the guard was obviated by the darkness, he commenced his work.

The only thing left to him of all his possessions was his clasp-knife, and, doubtless, this would have been taken from him but for its use in cutting up his prison rations. It now became the tool by which he was to loosen the slab of stone.

Slowly he toiled away at about the center of the narrow crevice, and though he found it harder labor than cutting through cedar boards, he at length cleared an opening the thickness of his knife blade, and could run the slender steel back and forth without touching any obstacle. As near as he could estimate the slab was about two inches thick.

An opening once formed he progressed more rapidly, and at the end of an hour had the west edge of the flagging all clear. Anxious to know how deep the space below the floor was, he now unrav-

eled a part of one of his stockings, and tying a bit of mortar to one end of the yarn, lowered it through the crevice. It did not go twelve inches before it struck what appeared to be soft dirt.

"I shall have to dig my way out, when I have raised the stone," he muttered, "and that may be a matter of days. Never mind, it gives me something to do, and is better than this tiresome inactivity."

He now began work on the upper edge of the stone, and in another hour had dug out the mortar. Stopping to rest his aching arms, he caught the same sound of digging he had heard the night before. Placing his ear to the lower edge of the slab he listened for some minutes, and then was satisfied of two things: *Some one was cautiously working below him with both pick and shovel; and was steadily coming his way.* As this direction was towards the east or outer wall of the fort his natural conclusion was that some prisoner had managed to secure the necessary tools and was making his way under the floor to the outer world.

"I have but to loosen this stone," the lad thought, "and join the man in his undertaking, and we shall both be free."

Animated by this idea he started down one of the long sides of the slab, removing the cement as rapidly as possible. As soon as he worked his knife through the mortar, he ran the blade down to the beam or pillar on which the stone rested. He had been right in his estimation. The flagging was barely two inches through, and with the help of the man below, if he could only attract his attention, could easily be lifted out of its place.

Before the side of the stone was cleared, however, a glimmer of a light came up through the crevice at the west edge of the slab. This surprised the lad more than the fact that the worker had a shovel and pick. It told of a thoroughness of preparation which

hardly seemed possible to any prisoner. Who could the laborer be? And what was his object?

As the puzzled boy waited, trying to answer the questions his brain had propounded, there came a light tap on the slab just below him, as though some one was testing its firmness. Taking his knife by the blade Bert lightly tapped the stone at the same spot where it had been struck from below, and instantly the sound of digging ceased.

The lad now tapped softly three times on the stone, and cautiously it was answered from below. Putting his mouth to the nearest crevice Bert whispered: "Hello!" As distinctly came the same word: "Hello," and then the digging was resumed. But of one thing the prisoner was entirely satisfied: *the laborer was his friend.*

He, therefore, resumed his own work, and more than an hour passed before either one of the toilers paused for communication. In fact, though the light constantly grew brighter and the sounds nearer, Bert did not stop his labor until there came a tap on the stone he was trying to loosen. Then a voice said in good English:

"Look out! I'm going to raise the slab."

This was followed by a strong, steady push, and almost without noise, the stone lifted. Catching hold of it the lad turned it over, and let it drop softly down upon the floor; then putting his head through the opening he eagerly asked:

"Who are you!"

"Felipe, the interpreter," was the reply; "and you are Bert Larkin?"

"Yes!" the boy assented. "Can I come down where you are?"

"Not quite yet. But cover the hole with something so my light won't attract the attention of any one in the corridor. I'll call you when all is ready."

Bert drew his pallet of straw over to the spot, and covered the hole with it. Then he waited.

Never had time seemed so long before. Seconds seemed minutes, and minutes hours, so impatient was he; and yet it was not over ten minutes before the bed was cautiously lifted, and the man said:

"Put the bed back in its place; brush the mortar off the floor into the hole; then fix the slab so we can drop it back into its place."

When these things were done, the interpreter added:

"Now come."

Silently the boy crept through the hole. The excavation was large enough for him and his liberator to stand side by side and without noise the stone was allowed to drop into its place.

"Follow me," the man said, crawling into the mouth of the tunnel. Bert obeyed, finding that twenty feet away it emerged into a narrow passage, running between high massive walls, and covered over with solid masonry, perhaps ten feet above their heads.

He looked questioningly at his companion.

"It is the underground route out of the fort," Felipe explained in low tones, "it starts from the colonel's quarters just beyond your cell, and runs down to a secluded cove beyond the limits of the fortress. Come on!"

He took up his tools and dark lantern, which had been removed to this point before he bade Bert leave his room, and led the way down the passage. They had gone about two hundred yards when they came into a natural cavern, whose floor was the ocean waves. Along the edge of the water they went then into a narrow, winding gorge, above which could be seen the sparkling stars, and at length reached the little land-locked, secluded inlet of which the guide had spoken.

Here there was a boat moored, and motioning his companion to get in, the rescuer turned off his light, put in his tools, and unfastened the craft. Then he, too, embarked, and taking up the oars rowed fearlessly across the sea towards a point where the glimmering lights revealed the town.

Undetected and unchallenged they approached a wharf, and fastening the yawl to a ring in its side, the interpreter carried his oars and tools to a small building near by, where he locked them up. After which he led the boy through several streets stopping finally before a small house, where they entered.

They were met by an old lady to whom the man said:

"Marie, this is the boy. I told you I should bring him to-night. Have you his room and clothes ready?"

"Yes, Felipe," she answered. "Come, Mr. Larkin."

"One word, sir, before I go," Bert now cried impulsively. "Tell me why at such a risk to yourself you have rescued me?"

"For your father's sake," the man replied. "But go bathe, and change your clothing, of which there is sad need. Then Marie will have food ready for us, and we'll talk as we eat."

He was led up-stairs to a small, barely furnished room, where he found everything necessary for a thorough bath, and coarse but serviceable clothing that fitted him as though made for him.

His clean garments were scarcely on when he was called into an adjoining room where a hearty repast of cold meat, bread, and fruit was on the table; and he and his liberator ate of it, with appetites sharpened by their toil and journey.

"My story is brief," the man said, as they began to eat. "I heard your talk with the colonel, and

knew there was a plot against your father and yourself. I owe much to Captain Larkin. Twice in my life as a sailor he has proved my friend. Felipe Peregrino forgets no favor, and no wrong. In this case it was a favor; but to know the captain's need and how I could serve him I was compelled to liberate you. That part of my work is done. Show me how I can serve your father?" The lad without hesitation told of the plot he had discovered, and all that he knew of his father's situation.

During the recital the listener broke out in repeated imprecations against the men who had dared to undertake such a scheme, and when Bert had finished, he exclaimed:

"We shall find the captain, and liberate him! He shall ride in triumph over his enemies! Wait until I see Benito, the young orderly again! I may learn something of him. Then we'll start for the mountains."

It was already the small hours of the morning, and the tired but happy boy was sent to his chamber with the direction not to leave it unless called; in ten minutes he was fast asleep.

It was well into the following night before he saw the old interpreter again. When he did come, however, he brought two bits of news: Bert's escape had, of course, been discovered, and the manner of it; but it was believed he had tunneled out without help, so no suspicion rested on Felipe. Then Benito the orderly was, on the following morning, going up to the Anvil with a message from Don José to come to Humacao at once for a consultation with Colonel Luzares, who, under imperative orders from the capital, dare not leave his post long enough for even so brief a trip.

When Bert heard this latter item he proposed a move so bold and daring that at first it startled the

old interpreter; but after a careful consideration he agreed to carry it out.

It was to seize Don José and hold him as a hostage for Captain Larkin's safety. Their preparations were soon made, and when morning dawned they were miles on their way towards the Anvil to carry the plan into execution.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL RAID.

In a little ravine through which the road ran from Humacao to the Anvil, and not over five miles from the mansion house itself, two travelers were halted. One of them was our young hero and the other the old man Felipe.

It was not yet noon, and, after allowing their horses to drink from the sparkling stream that rippled through the dell, they led the beasts into the surrounding forest until they were concealed from the view of any one who might be passing, where they hitched them. Then Bert threw himself down under the shade of an adjacent tree, where he could keep an eye on the animals, while his companion returned to the highway.

A quarter of an hour after these preparations another horseman came over the hill from the south and descended at a sharp trot into the gorge. He saw the waiting man, and with no show of surprise, remarked:

"I'm here, Uncle Felipe; lead on."

The old man entered the brush, followed by the trooper, and they joined Bert who greeted the newcomer cordially.

A package on the saddle of one of the hitched horses was now unstrapped and opened, disclosing an abundant supply of food. Of this the three comrades hurriedly ate, and then, as though pre-arranged, Felipe and the orderly exchanged clothing;

after which the former, mounting his horse, rode off alone towards the Anvil ranch.

There was nothing in his appearance or attitude when, an hour later, he galloped up to the mansion house that proclaimed him otherwise than what he pretended to be—a messenger from Colonel Carlos Luzares with a letter for Don José Sardinas.

He was received by the latter gentleman courteously though somewhat haughtily, and shown to the office, where the missive he brought was opened.

The brow of the Don darkened as he read it.

"So that boy has escaped," he cried, looking savagely at the waiting orderly as though he was to blame for this unfortunate circumstance.

"Yes, señor; but he will surely be retaken," the man answered, respectfully.

"No doubt of that," the Spaniard responded, his anger mollified by this thought. "But to another matter; this note says I am to come to Humacao at once with you."

"Certainly, señor, if you will furnish me with a fresh horse."

"I will order dinner for you immediately, and, while you eat, the horses will be brought to the door," promised Don José. "In an hour we can be on our way."

It was less than that time when they trotted briskly away from the house; and still early in the afternoon when they rode into the little ravine five miles to the south.

As they began the descent a lad, plainly seen by them both, was sitting by the brook bathing his face with the cool water; but, as he descried the coming horseman, he quickly leaped to his feet, and disappeared in the forest.

"Holy Mother! I believe that was the escaped prisoner," the Don's attendant cried.

"It was," shouted the Spaniard. "After him!"

He himself led the way, and rode fearlessly into the brush after the fleeing lad. A few rods in the woods he overhauled him, and, leaping from his horse, he drew his machete, saying:

"It's no use; I have you now, surrender!"

He raised his weapon to strike the boy, if he resisted, but quickly allowed the uplifted knife to fall to his side, unused. There was wisdom in his act, as Bert—for it was indeed he—held a cocked pistol within a few feet of the man's breast, and replied coolly in Spanish:

"I think not, Don José. In fact I know it is the other way. You are my prisoner."

At the same moment a pair of strong arms were thrown about the baffled Spaniard, and he was borne to the ground, while a voice said lowly and suavely:

"We are sorry, Don, to use you in this way; but it is no worse than you have served Captain Larkin."

As he spoke Felipe put one knee on his prisoner's breast, and, assisted by Bert, first disarmed, and then firmly bound him with cords that the lad had in readiness.

"Secure his horse, while I go for mine," the old interpreter now said.

He returned in a few minutes, leading his horse which he had left in the road when he followed the Don into the forest. Then he said in English:

"So far your little scheme, lad, has worked like magic; now we'll examine the fellow's bag.

It was taken from his horse, and opened. Within was a bundle of papers which the man and boy eagerly examined.

First was the deed of the ranch, still unsigned by Captain Larkin, and as Bert beheld it he cried exultingly:

"I'll make sure it is never signed," and tearing it in pieces, he applied a match to the fragments, which were soon consumed.

A second paper was a carefully drawn plan of the bandit rendezvous and the way to it; on the margin there was also a list of the remaining members of the gang—twelve in all.

"And this shows us just where father is, and how to find him," our hero said, as he and Felipe finished their examination of the manuscript.

"It surely does, lad; we are in luck," responded his comrade.

But there was a third paper—a letter written to Colonel Luzares in Spanish, but which Felipe easily read. It announced that Captain Larkin had consented to sign the deed on condition that he be allowed to look upon and converse with the son he had never yet seen.

"He says," the cruel note went on, "that he is willing to give every dollar he has for this privilege, but must see the boy before he signs his name. So send the lad to me, and I will take him to his father. Then you, following the directions I enclose, can sweep down on the rendezvous with your squad and wipe out the gang and their prisoners together."

"There, that will surely convince Mr. Swallow of Don José's guilt," Bert said on reading it; "come, Felipe, the sooner we start for his plantation the better."

"Yes," assented his companion, "but wait until I get your horse and send Benito away."

He disappeared in the woods, and a few minutes later the sound of a horse's hoofs were heard on the road, hastening towards Humacao. It was the young orderly, and he bore a note written in Spanish by Felipe, but signed by Bert, which read:

"Near the Anvil, July 26th.

"Colonel Luzares,

"I am not only free, but Don José is my prisoner. The tables are turned, and with friends to

help me, I expect soon to see my father liberated and yourself a prisoner in your own fortress.

"BERT LARKIN."

At sunset Benito reported to his commanding officer as follows—a truthful statement on his part:

"I did not find the Don, but this letter was given me to deliver to you."

The Colonel's cheek blanched as he read the brief missive, but what he would have said or done is unknown, for at that instant another orderly arrived at the fort with official despatches from San Juan, directing that the entire Spanish force under the chagrined officer's charge be prepared to march for the south shore at a moment's notice, as United States troops had sailed for the island and might land at any hour.

So his private affairs had to be set aside for the general good, and, with a smothered imprecation at what he called an accursed fate, the unhappy commander turned his attention to the assigned duty. His marching orders reached him on the following day, and the execution of the prisoners under his care was, therefore, indefinitely postponed, while he at the head of his troops led the way to Caguas, where he would strike the great military road running between San Juan and Ponce.

But we will now return to our young hero. When Benito had departed, he and Felipe placed their discomfited prisoner upon his horse, binding him securely there; then they headed for the mountains, on their way to the Englishman's plantation.

The distance was about the same as the young orderly had to travel to reach Humacao, but the path was rougher, and the care of their captive delayed them considerably, so night overtook them long before they reached their destination.

There was a new moon, however, and under its pale light they found their way through the woods, and a little before midnight halted at the door of the house. It was an easy task to arouse Mr. Swallow, and he soon came to the main entrance.

"Who is there?" he questioned, before he threw back the bolts.

"It is I! Bert Larkin," the lad responded. "Felipe Peregrino, a native, is with me, and we have Don José Sardinas as a prisoner. Let us in, and I will explain everything."

The next minute the door was open, and the Englishman in his pyjamas appeared.

"What's that? Don José a prisoner? What do you mean?"

"We have good reason for it," Bert replied, jumping from his horse and stepping upon the veranda beside his friend.

Then in low tones he told the experiences he had passed through since he departed from that hospitable roof, and what he had learned of the Don's scheme.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the incredulous planter. "I can hardly believe your statements. Don José was your father's trusted friend, and he sent me a note by your guide explaining that, while the ranch was nominally in his name, he was only holding it during the war; then your father was to return. Can it be you have made a serious mistake?"

"I know what I have seen and heard, and felt, in the last two months," expostulated the boy; "and, besides, I have proofs of the Spaniard's guilt in his own handwriting, if you will only look at them."

"Certainly! Certainly! I'll do that much. But let me call a servant to take your horses, then you may all come in here."

In a few minutes the travelers were in the parlor,

the old interpreter keeping watch over the Don, who was pale but defiant, while the lad and his friend examined the papers the former had in his possession.

These, along with the boy's full explanations (confirmed at certain points by Felipe), convinced the doubting ranchman, and he said:

"I must think this matter over before I advise you in your next move. But, meantime, you and your comrade must have food and rest. Fortunately, I have a strong room where I can put the Spaniard under the guard of four men whom I can trust, and so relieve you from that vigil."

He hastened to carry out these preparations, and an hour later both Bert and Felipe had been fed, and were sleeping soundly in the chambers to which they had been shown.

The following day neither the lad nor his faithful ally were disturbed until the dinner hour.

At that meal Mr. Swallow remarked:

"I find I have a man who can lead us to the very spot in the mountains marked on your map as the headquarters of the bandits, and I have concluded that our first work should be to release your father and Mr. Barnes.

"We will start at nightfall, and close in on the rendezvous, so as to surprise the robbers at dawn; and I think we better take the Don with us, for if we fail in capturing the marauders, it is possible we may be able to exchange the Spaniard for our friends. Once show the gang this letter you have, and they will make a summary end of their former leader. It may not be just the thing to do, but there will be poetic justice in such a move."

As the sun went down twenty-five heavily armed men, collected from the peasants on the ranch, together with Felipe, Bert, and the Englishman, started for the mountains.

Horses were used for the first ten miles, and then the rescuers proceeded on foot. Scouts were thrown out as they advanced, and at length the squad had closed in the one entrance to the narrow gorge in which the brigands made their headquarters.

A halt was now made, until a rosy light in the east told of the breaking day; then, with rifles ready for immediate use, the men moved cautiously up the pass until the little plateau with its four rude huts was in sight.

Thus far not a sign of the bandits had been discovered, and, believing their surprise was complete, the raiding party rushed into the clearing, and surrounded every cabin.

As there was no longer any need of silence they now with shouts burst open the door of each building, and then stared about them in amazement. All the huts were empty.

A minute search was immediately made of the premises. There was every trace of recent occupation, but bandits and prisoners alike had utterly vanished.

The steep cliffs on every side furnished no possible outlet; no one had passed down the gorge since the scouts first approached it. There was then but one conclusion: for reasons of their own the old rendezvous had been abandoned by the marauders some hours before the raid on them was undertaken.

It was clear, too, that the captured Don was as much mystified by this movement of his former colleagues as were his captors. He admitted that he had been there only three days before, and the gang was then occupying their usual quarters. There seemed no solution to the mystery until Bert suddenly remarked:

"The robbers have learned in some way—perhaps through the letter I sent father—that Don José had arranged for the soldiers to attack them as soon

as I was brought up here, and so have changed their place of concealment. This gives them the winning card, for they can now dictate terms either way—to father's friends, or his enemies—and unload to the highest bidder."

"You are right," Mr. Swallow emphatically declared; "and there is but one thing for us to do: post a notice on the cabins of your escape and the Don's capture, and request the band to communicate with you at my ranch. It is possible you will hear from them."

This plan was adopted. Bert wrote a note in English—that his father or Mr. Barnes might be called on to translate it, and so would receive tidings directly from him—and placed it on the door of the first hut where any one visiting the old rendezvous must see it. Then the raiding party began its return.

Five miles down the mountain where they rejoined their horses, old Felipe took Bert and the Englishman aside, and proposed that he return to the pass, and watch for the reappearance of the bandits.

"I will then follow them to their new quarters," he said, "and immediately report to you."

The suggestion was a good one; so he was supplied with two or three days' rations from the provisions the party had with them, and then went back into the hills.

It was too late when they reached the plantation for Mr. Swallow's next movement to be undertaken that day; but early on the following morning he carried it out. It was the sending of a trusty messenger to the English consul at San Juan, acquainting him with the situation of affairs at the Anvil, and asking two questions:

"What shall be done with Don José? And what can be done for Captain Larkin and Jack Barnes?"

The man returned at the close of the second day with this brief reply:

"San Juan, July 31st.

"My dear Swallow,

"The United States troops have landed on the island. Ponce has surrendered without a blow, and the whole southern shore is flocking to the newcomers with open arms. Miles' advance is a perfect ovation.

"Let young Larkin, therefore, go to the nearest camp of his countrymen, and ask for a force sufficient to protect his property and liberate his father, though they scour the mountains to do it. His request will be granted. Turn the villainous Don over to the American authorities when they reach the Anvil.

"Yours,
"Ralston."

Felipe had not yet come down from the hills, but believing he could leave the whole matter of his father's rescue (should the opportunity for it come during his absence) in the hands of the planter and the old interpreter, Bert the next morning mounted his horse, and, with a single attendant, started on his journey across the island to the American camp.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER THE FLAG.

The route followed by our hero in his travels was over the mountain to the south, thence along the foot of the range to a cart-road running to the southwest, and at length emerging into the highway from Humacao to Caguas, near the village of Guanabo.

The first part of the way was rough, and compelled slow going; but the farther the lad advanced into the island the better the traveling became, and at nightfall he reached Caguas, on the great military road.

He found the town garrisoned by a company of Spanish soldiers, left there two days before by Colonel Luzares, while he with the rest of his command had gone to Aibonito, twenty-five miles to the south and west.

The city was in intense excitement, also, over the rumors that had just reached there of the rapid advance of the United States forces in two divisions—one from Ponce through Juan Diaz and Coamo towards Aibonito; and the other from Arroyo through Guyamo towards Coyey, thus bringing the Spanish troops at Aibonito between the two bodies of the enemy, and cutting off every possibility of their retreat. The rumors were premature, but served to arouse an intense enthusiasm among the native population, which even the presence of the Spanish soldiers could scarcely hold in check.

Bert became acquainted with these facts as he

waited supper in the public room of the one small hotel that the town afforded, and his own heart quickened with the hope that, before another night, he might be under the protection of his country's flag—never so dear as now.

As he stood looking out of the tavern window at the throngs on the street, an officer accompanied by a half-dozen soldiers came along. In an instant the watching lad recognized in the subaltern a man whom he had frequently seen while confined in the fortress at Humacao, and fearing that he should himself be recognized he turned quickly away. But the movement was not soon enough. The keen eye of the lieutenant fell upon the boy, and halting his men, he strode across to the hostelry, and entered.

Realizing that his safety now depended upon his coolness and audacity Bert faced the man, remarking pleasantly in Spanish :

" Good evening, Señor Lieutenant ; there is a large crowd on the streets to-night."

" Yes, señor," the officer assented, puzzled by the ease and fluency with which the traveler addressed him in his native tongue. He must be mistaken, this could not be the young American prisoner, who had surprised all by his sudden escape from the fortress a few days before, and who spoke only English. But he meant to be sure, and so asked :

" Whence do you come, señor ? "

" From the north, Lieutenant," the lad remarked with the same calm assurance ; " I was on my way to Ponce, but if rumors are true, I do not know as it will be best to attempt to go farther. What do you think ? "

" I think not," the baffled officer responded, walking across the room and ordering a glass of wine as an excuse for his entrance.

Bert, secretly congratulating himself on the success of his ruse, was about to leave the office, when

a young orderly, covered with dust from his rapid riding, dismounted at the door. A single look showed the lad that the newcomer was Benito, and with a feeling of dismay at the sight of one who would have no doubt as to his identity, he suddenly paused, uncertain what course to pursue.

His back was towards the Spanish lieutenant, who could not, therefore, detect the tell-tale expression that, in spite of himself, had swept over our hero's face; but the orderly saw it, and understood it. He also noticed another thing: that the drinking officer had whirled on his heel, and was watching keenly to see if there was any show of recognition between himself and the young traveler.

Benito, however, was equal to the emergency; for he strode by the young American with a careless, indifferent glance, and, saluting the subaltern, asked:

"Where shall I find Captain Rialtos, Lieutenant Barriles? I have a message for him from Colonel Luzares."

"I am reporting to him now, and you may accompany me," the officer replied, quite satisfied that his suspicions respecting the young stranger were groundless.

The two left the hotel together, but not until the orderly in passing Bert had, unnoticed by his companion, whispered the words:

"I will see you soon."

It was perhaps two hours later when he, unannounced, walked into Bert's room, and with a little laugh, remarked:

"A close call, wasn't it? But tell me why you are here? and where is Uncle Felipe?"

Quickly the lad explained what had transpired since the orderly last saw him, and the reason for his present journey. Then he inquired, anxiously:

"Do you think I can reach the American camp?"

"I would try it," his friend replied, thoughtfully. "It is safer than for you to remain here, as Lieutenant Barriles is suspicious of you, and asked me who I thought you were. Only your familiarity with Spanish saved you from arrest to-night.

"I thought as much," said Bert, lightly; than he questioned:

"Shall I get away at once?"

"Why not go with me?" asked the orderly. "I brought an order for Captain Rialtos to move his company down to Cayey to-morrow, and shall return to Aibonito immediately."

"My only difficulty is about horses—for I have a man with me. I am afraid the animals we rode to-day cannot stand the additional journey without rest," responded Bert.

"We can arrange that," replied Benito. "Leave your man and horses here, for the night, with orders to return to the Anvil in the morning. Then I will direct that two fresh horses be got ready, one for myself and the other for my attendant. I'll have them taken to the south end of the town where you can join me. There will be a good moon until after midnight, and we shall have no trouble in reaching Aibonito before it goes down. From there you can continue your journey alone."

Our hero accepted the plan as the most feasible one under the existing circumstances, and for twenty-five miles accompanied the young orderly down the great turnpike, arriving at about two o'clock in the morning in the vicinity of the city named.

Here Benito left him, his last advice being:

"I know you are tired, but you had better go around the city before it is light, and take your rest afterwards."

Having no desire to fall into the hands of Colonel Luzares again, Bert, weary as he was, accepted this suggestion; and, taking the route the young orderly

kindly marked out for him before they parted, he began the detour necessary to encircle the town.

There was no real danger of detection until he reapproached the military road at the west side of the city. Here, on a height that commanded the highway, the temporary post had been established, while for several miles towards Coamo a patrol was kept up. But, as Benito had furnished him with the password for the night, he hoped under the cover of the darkness to run the gantlet of the guards without serious delay.

This expectation was realized. He passed the city, and had gone a mile down the turnpike before he was even challenged. Then a mounted patrol, riding towards the city, hailed him:

"Who comes there?"

"Friend," Bert promptly answered; but he laid his hand upon his pistol, determined to fight his way down the road if necessary.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign," was the reply; but there was also an ominous click of a rifle that told how the soldier was not to be trifled with.

Riding therefore close to the trooper the lad said in a low tone:

"The boy king."

"All right," the sentinel responded; "but how is it you are not in uniform?"

"I'm on a special mission," explained the boy, confidentially. "If possible I'm going right into the enemy's camp. How far below here is it?"

"At Coamo," the soldier answered; then growing confidential in his turn he went on:

"Our men came in from there yesterday. But," and now he lowered his voice, "our colonel is going to reconnoiter down that way this morning, and may put a masked battery at the bridge a mile this side of the town. Two of our scouts have gone

down that way to look over the ground, and they told me. You will doubtless run in with them."

"Thanks! I'll be on the lookout for them," was the truthful promise, and Bert rode on.

Two miles below he entered a wood thick enough to afford concealment, and having now been the greater portion of twenty-two hours in the saddle, he felt entitled to a rest. Turning into the brush, therefore, he selected a spot that promised a secure hiding-place for both himself and beast, and dismounted. Hitching the animal firmly to a stout sapling, he threw himself on the ground, and in a minute was fast asleep.

He was aroused after a while by the uneasiness of his horse, and immediately sprang to his feet. The sun was an hour or two high; the wind blew gently through the overhanging tree-tops, and the birds flew back and forth, unfrightened and undisturbed.

But the beast had its nose high in the air, and was sniffing loudly. There was something near that his quick ear or delicate sense detected. What was it?

He listened, and promptly decided that far away up the road a squad of horsemen was coming. Was there time for him to reach the highway, and resume his journey? Or would it be wiser to remain in hiding there?

He was about to try the former experiment, when he heard the sound of voices no great distance from him.

Springing to his horse, Bert's first act was to pull off his coat and button it over the animal's head. This strange and unsuspected blindfolding quieted the beast instantly, and it stood there trembling and quivering with fear.

Then the boy slipped noiselessly off through the woods towards the place from which the low murmur of talking still came.

He soon reached the turnpike, and, peering through the bushes, saw two soldiers on foaming horses, halted under the shade of a huge palm.

"I think you are right," one of the men was saying; "the colonel is coming, and will be pleased with the news we bring."

"Yes," agreed the other; "and I'm glad we reached here first. He can no longer accuse us of dilatoriness."

Before the other made any reply, a squad of men rode up, and at their head Bert recognized the well-known form of Colonel Luzares.

The waiting troopers saluted him, and at once gave their report:

"The camp of the Americans is outside of Coamo, but fully a mile below the bridge, Colonel; and, if we work rapidly, the battery can be put in position there before they suspect our presence."

"The guns are now on their way," answered the commander, "and will be up with us shortly." Then he consulted with his scouts as to the best plan of putting the cannon into place.

The troopers had brought a drafting of the locality with them, which they now submitted to their superior officer. Pointing out the bridge, and then an adjacent height on the rude map, they advised him to hurry on with his cavalry and hold the commanding position until the battery could be brought down there; and this the colonel decided to do as soon as he had acquainted the captain of the artillery with the plan of operations.

The listening boy waited to hear no more of the discussion. A great resolve had been born in his soul. He would reach his countrymen in time for them to occupy the bridge before the arrival of the Spaniards, if possible.

In three minutes he was back by his horse; unhitching it, he patted the animal a moment to re-

store its confidence in him, and then led it, still blindfolded, silently and swiftly through the forest, on a parallel with the road.

This course he continued for some time; then he gradually drew near the highway, coming out upon it at a point some distance beyond, and quite out of sight of the place where he had left the enemy.

Then, removing his coat from the head of the horse, he mounted, and dashed away to the south at his fastest speed.

In fifteen minutes he thundered over the bridge of which the Spaniards had spoken, and, with scarcely a glance at it, settled himself for the last mile of his ride. A minute later he turned the corner, where he came abruptly upon two horsemen, who were apparently waiting there for his coming, for instantly their rifles were at their shoulders, and they cried out in Spanish the one word:

"Surrender!"

Bert did not understand why the men were in canvas uniforms, but the letters on their broad hats assured him that they were United States volunteers, and he therefore answered in delight, speaking also in English:

"Gladly! if you will only take me to your commanding officer. I have some important news for him."

"Are you a Yankee?" they questioned in some surprise.

"Yes, sir; every inch, born and bred so!" he exclaimed, laughingly. "Lead on!"

They, without further ceremony, turned their horses, and, one on either side, galloped along with him for three-quarters of a mile, where they came to a rude intrenchment, back of which could be seen a collection of tents, while over the whole there floated on the morning breeze the handsomest flag in the world—"Old Glory."

Bert could not help it. Off came his hat, and, when his guards had reported to the officer of the day, he followed them past the sentinel into the encampment with a bared head.

He was now under the flag that meant justice, equality and safety to every man, woman, and child who claimed its protection.

CHAPTER XXV.

BACK AT THE RANCH.

The scouts rode directly to the tent of the commanding officer with their prisoner.

"Major Greene," one of them said to the officer that instantly appeared, "this youngster says he has an important message for you."

But Bert sat there on his horse for a full minute, staring at the man before him.

"Why, Mr. Greene!" he finally ejaculated. "Who expected to see you in Porto Rico, and a soldier too!"

The commander, who had been looking at the boy with a puzzled expression on his face, now recognized him, and replied:

"It is Bert Larkin, I declare! But, lad, how did you escape the wrecked steamer? And how came you in this part of the island?"

"It is a long story, Major," the happy boy responded, "and it can wait. There is a more important message for you first," and leaning over the neck of his horse, he told of Colonel Luzares' plan which he had overheard a few miles up the road.

The officer received the news as if it was an item of small concern; or at least one over which he could take all the time he pleased. For he turned to his scouts and talked with them for some time about the bridge, the heights beyond it, and its importance as a commanding position; then he said to the men:

"Return to the bridge, and, keeping watch of the enemy's movement, report to me their arrival."

To a waiting orderly he added: "Send Captains Rice and Howell to me immediately."

"Have you had any breakfast, Bert?" he asked when they were alone.

"No, sir," the lad admitted. A servant was called, and a substantial meal soon placed before the boy.

He had scarcely finished it when a horse saddled and bridled was brought to the tent door. Buckling on his sword, and taking his pistols, the officer now remarked, carelessly:

"I shall be back in an hour or two, my boy. Make yourself at home here until my return."

"Oh! let me go with you, Major!" Bert cried eagerly. "I want to see the fight."

Only for a moment did his friend hesitate. Then he said:

"You may go, if you wish, but, remember, you are subject to my commands."

"Certainly," assented the lad, rushing out for his horse.

The major's proceedings had apparently been slow and methodical, yet it was not over twenty minutes after our hero delivered his message before two companies of infantry were moving up the road at double quick, every man elated at the prospect of a brush with the enemy; but none were more eager than the lad who rode beside the major, and his wish was: "I hope we shall capture Colonel Luzares and all his men."

It was, however, a sadder scene than that he was to witness.

The skirmish at the bridge near Coamo is now a matter of history—one of the very few places on the island of Porto Rico where American blood was

shed during the Spanish-American War—and fortunately only a small amount.

We shall give, however, the details of that conflict only so far as they affect the fortunes of our hero.

The two forces reached the disputed point about the same moment. If there was any advantage it was in the favor of the Spaniards, but the battery had not yet been put into position, and anxious to take the height before the cannons became serviceable, Major Greene dashed over the bridge with the shout:

"Forward, men! The victory is ours!"

Side by side with him Bert rode. The stream was crossed, and the ascent of the hill begun just as Colonel Luzares gave the order for his troops to fire.

It was the only volley the Spaniards poured into the American ranks, but under it two men—one an officer—were killed, and several wounded.

It made no impression, however, on the advancing men. As coolly as though on dress parade they climbed the hill; as regularly as though shooting at a target they poured in their deadly fire.

Alarmed by the unwavering advance of their opponents, and decimated by the showering bullets, the Spanish troops now broke, and fled helter-skelter up the road or through the neighboring woods.

There was a moment when their commander might have safely followed them. But he suddenly found himself face to face with his late prisoner, and, recognizing him at once, he delayed for a personal revenge.

"Die, spy and bandit," he hissed, dropping his sword, and drawing a pistol from his belt. The next instant, he raised the weapon and pressed the trigger.

Utterly unprepared for the attack, Bert would

have been shot down but for the watchful eye of Major Greene. As the Spaniard raised the revolver, that officer leaped his horse forward, and struck the uplifted arm with his sword. It turned the aim of the pistol, and the bullet lodged in the neck of the animal the colonel was riding. Staggering forward the beast fell, pitching its rider to the ground. But he was on his feet in an instant, and exclaiming:

"I shall never be taken alive," he put his own weapon to his breast, and fired.

As he fell to the ground from his self-inflicted wound, the men who were still with him surrendered, and the short, sharp skirmish was over, the victory was with the United States troops.

The wounded officer had scarcely touched the earth, however, before Major Greene and Bert, dismounting, were beside him. As they raised him up his eyes opened, and rested upon them.

"I am dying," he said, faintly, in his native tongue.

Major Greene looked inquiringly at the lad near him, who translated the solemn words into English.

"Tell him I hope not," the humane major replied; "and that we will move him to the camp as speedily as possible where he can have medical aid."

Bert repeated the message to the Spaniard.

"I am dying," the colonel declared again; "and I'm glad of it. Better so than disgrace. Boy," he went on, fixing his eyes on the lad who knelt by his side, "Don José and I played for heavy stakes, but you have beaten us. Tell him I'm glad of it, for now I have not that sin to answer for. Save, too, those innocent men at the fort, if you can——" his voice grew weaker; his eyes closed for a moment. Then they opened wide again.

"Long live Spain! Long live the king!" he shouted, and fell back dead.

Though Major Greene did not understand what

the man said, he realized that Bert and the officer knew each other, and that this last conversation had some reference to past events which were familiar to them, therefore he glanced questioningly towards the lad.

"I will explain all to you when we are back at your tent, Major," Bert remarked as he noticed that officer's gaze. "But the poor man is dead now, and I shall try not to judge him too harshly."

Some hours later, in the privacy of Major Greene's tent, Bert therefore related the strange and thrilling experiences through which he had passed since he arrived at the island, and with which the dead colonel had had so much to do. Then showing the letter which the English consul at San Juan had written Mr. Swallow, he told the errand on which he had come.

"I will report the matter to the general in person, and ask to be assigned to the duty myself," Major Greene said, impulsively; and he immediately took steps towards the fulfilment of the promise.

Within twenty-four hours he and the lad were closeted with General Miles, who on hearing our hero's story gave an order for one of the auxiliary steamers to carry Major Greene and an adequate force from the Port of Ponce to Point de la Luna, a few miles north of Humacao.

Here they were disembarked, and horses procured from the friendly planters in that region for the journey across the country to the Anvil.

Only one incident befell them on the trip which is of importance enough to relate.

When within a short distance of the ranch they suddenly came upon two men who were camping by the roadside.

As the cavalcade swept down upon the campers they sprang to their feet, and rushing for their horses, which were tethered close at hand, endeav-

ored to escape. But only one of them succeeded in doing so; the other was not quick enough, and was surrounded and captured by the head troopers before he could mount his animal.

Bert arrived on the scene just as the man was seized, and glancing at him and then at his horse, he cried:

"Hold him! He must be one of the gang of robbers; for that is the horse old Felipe rode when he went back alone into the mountains."

The man took his arrest coolly. Looking first at the uniformed men, he asked:

"Americanos?"

"Yes," his captors assented.

Then he pointed towards Bert inquiring:

"Young Señor Larkin?"

"Si," Bert responded in Spanish. Then he eagerly questioned: "Do you know where my father is?"

"I do," the fellow replied, boldly. "I know where the captain, and Barnes and Felipe all are. That is Felipe's horse."

"I know it," the lad retorted. "That is why we arrested you. Will you show us where father is?"

The man looked the boy over, then he said:

"I will take you where he is, if I may then go free."

The lad translated this offer to Major Greene.

"We'll think it over," replied the officer. "It will be time enough to decide when we reach the ranch, which you say is now near."

So the captured bandit was put on his horse, and the whole squad rode on rapidly towards their destination.

In an hour they were there. The mansion house was found to be in the charge of the same negro that had waited on Don José the night Bert first visited the plantation; and he was not only seized

but questioned sharply as to his knowledge of his master's affairs.

It soon became apparent that the fellow knew nothing of the schemer's plans, and had only obeyed the Spanish noble as his employer, and, as he believed, the rightful owner of the estate.

Announcing, therefore, that he was Captain Larkin's son, and should take charge of the ranch until his father could be found, Bert ordered entertainment to be provided for the American officer and his men.

He then, at Major Greene's suggestion, sent for the nearest gefes and made a similar announcement to them; but he also explained enough of Don José's rascally plot for them to understand that Captain Larkin and Mr. Barnes were alive and in the hands of the bandits, from whom the troops now hoped to rescue them.

Producing the captured bandit he now asked if any of the chiefs knew him.

Half of the assembled men immediately called him by name, and on further questioning stated that the fellow had once lived on the plantation, but had been discharged by Captain Larkin for theft.

Turning to the robber, therefore, Bert made this promise:

"If you will lead us to the place where father and his friends are confined, I will agree to tell father of your act and leave your case in his hands. He shall decide what is to be done with you."

"And if I don't?" the man questioned.

"You will be turned over to the American authorities as one of the gang of bandits that has pillaged this community, and suffer as such."

The fellow after a moment's thought said:

"I will leave it to the captain."

"Very well," answered the young master of the ranch, "and as your companion escaped, and doubt-

less will report our arrival here at your rendezvous, we will start for the hills without delay."

A half dozen soldiers under a sergeant were left in charge of the house; but the others, led by Bert and the major, mounted their horses and rode rapidly off towards the mountains.

The route they took led near the ravine where the boy had a week before made his unsuccessful raid in company with Mr. Swallow, and he pointed out to the officer, who was riding near him, the way into the glen, and explained its security and seclusiveness.

"I presume it is in some such spot as that, only perhaps more solitary, we shall now find the imprisoned men," he said.

It was an hour before sundown when they came to a stream coursing around the peak of the Great Anvil itself, and their guide announced that this formed the road into the bandit stronghold.

All talking was, therefore, forbidden; the cavalcade was formed into a column, with four horsemen abreast—as many as could ride side by side in the brook—and as silently and as rapidly as possible the ascent of the stream began.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FATHER AND SON.

When Felipe proposed to Mr. Swallow and Bert that he should return to the hills and watch for traces of the bandits, it was really a desire on his part not only to find the new rendezvous of the miscreants, but to deliver, single-handed, Captain Larkin and the old sailor from their imprisonment. He reasoned thus:

"I released that boy though a whole battalion was guarding him. What then is a squad of a dozen men—a mere bagatelle? Once locate the camp, and I shall find a way to accomplish my purpose."

He may have been conceited in the estimation of his own powers, but his motive was a laudable one. He desired to effect the deliverance of his old friend in a way that would give the whole credit to himself—and simply to show his gratitude for past favors.

His journey back to the pass was made cautiously, for he had a suspicion that the raiding party might have been watched and followed; but as he rode slowly along he discovered nothing to confirm this suspicion, and when, on arriving at the clearing, he found the note Bert had left still untouched, he dismissed every fear. The brigands were not around, and probably were in absolute ignorance of this visit to their old headquarters.

His first act, therefore, was to take down the missive so conspicuously posted up, and put it into

his pocket. Not that he for a moment purposed to keep it from those for whom it was intended; it was his plan rather, when the whereabouts of the robbers was determined, to go boldly into their camp and deliver the letter—representing himself as the messenger of Mr. Swallow and young Larkin.

In this way he hoped to secure an interview with Captain Larkin, and obtain some idea of the place in which the officer and his comrade in misfortune —Mr. Barnes—were confined. Such a knowledge of the rendezvous and its surroundings were indispensable to the carrying out of the scheme which was fast forming in his mind. One factor that entered into the ultimate success of the plan, however, he did not make full allowance for: whether the bandits, after he once visited their camp would permit him to depart.

Having secured the note he returned down the pass until he found a secluded nook where he could hide, and yet have a good view of any one who entered the gorge, and there he began what proved to be not only a tiresome but a fruitless vigil.

Not a person appeared during the whole day, and as darkness came on he went back to the plateau, where he first tethered his horse, and then took up his own quarters in the largest of the huts—the one which had been the main dwelling of the gang. Here, after a frugal supper, he crawled into the loft, and fixed himself as comfortably as possible for a night's rest.

"If the clearing is visited," he reasoned, "the intruder will be likely to come here, and I shall hear him;" but the night passed as the day before it, without any one to disturb the quietness and peace of the deserted rendezvous.

The next morning as Felipe prepared his solitary breakfast he communed long and earnestly with himself.

"There's something about this I'm not allowing for," he muttered, "and let me see if I can reason it out. The boy was right when he said it was his letter to his father that led to the change of the bandits' camp. The captain is a shrewd one, and is playing off those rascals, one set against the other. But he'd want to make sure of the boy—surer than he did of himself. How now has he done it?"

For sometime the old interpreter remained in deep thought. In fact it was not until he had eaten his breakfast, and lighted his cigarette that he again resumed his soliloquy. Then he went on:

"The captain certainly expected the Don to bring the lad here; why now didn't the gang wait until the Spaniard and boy had come before they changed their headquarters. They could have caught both and taken them along too. It must be they were afraid that Don José's coming would be so closely followed up by the colonel and his soldiers they'd have no chance to escape; and so it isn't likely they would let their old leader go unwatched."

"He says he was here three days ago—or said so yesterday—that was then Sunday. Monday he expected a messenger from the colonel, and had his letter all written to him, asking for the boy. But when I called, requesting him to go down to Humacao, it changed the plans somewhat"—and he chuckled lowly at the thought—"but I may count it as a sure thing the bandits knew he went off with me, and they are watching for his return. There's no use for them to come here until he does—and not even then unless it is safe for them to do so. Now I'm on the right track."

He rolled up another cigarette, smiling complacently all the while. When it was lighted he continued:

"What I want now is to strike the trail of the man who reports at headquarters how things are

going on down at the ranch. How 'm I going to do it? It's likely he's down that way now, and probably looked for the Don's return last night. He'll wait a good bit of to-day for him, and when the Spaniard don't come, he'll go up to the rendezvous with the tidings. I must find a way to intercept him."

"It would be easy enough if I knew the direction from which he would come; but, doubtless, he changes that each time he makes a trip. He would do that as a blind anyway. Now isn't there some place where, whatever route he took from the ranch, he'd at length strike in entering the hills? I must see."

He packed up his traps; loaded them on his horse; and started down the pass. It was still early morning, and he felt there was no great haste. He wanted first of all to find a spot from which he could get a general survey of the landscape clear down to the Anvil mansion.

None of the crags about him seemed to offer just the point of observation he desired, so he rode on, working slowly to the west and north—a direction which at last brought him out in full view of the sharp part of the mountain peak which formed the point to The Anvil, and gave to the locality its name.

There it loomed up before him, five hundred feet in the air, and not over a mile away.

"I wonder if I can climb up there," he said, gazing at the mountain top; "if so, I can see most of the island."

He knew it would be a hard climb, but, concluding to make the trial, looked round for a place to conceal his horse. He was not at a loss, however, to find a suitable place for the hiding. The huge gum trees that grew at that high level, and the rank ferns of the tropics were all about him. Chasms

in the ledges, and breaks among the great boulders, abounded. A score of places presented themselves at a single glance adaptable for his purpose.

It was an opening in the rock, almost hid by an enormous gum tree, and not over fifty feet away, that he finally selected. Leading the animal past the tree trunk into the cavern, he fastened it securely to a fragment of stone. Then he drew deadwood across the mouth until it was fully concealed. No one would suspect the presence of the horse there, and the big gumwood would enable him to identify the place from a long distance.

He was now prepared for his climbing, and walked quickly along the slope, looking for the best place to ascend. In a few minutes he heard the rushing of a stream, and, thinking he would find an accessible path along its banks, hastened towards it.

Reaching the brook two hundred feet further on, he suddenly gave a low exclamation of delight. The cause of his utterance was the discovery of a horse's track on the bank of the stream. It looked fresh, and as though but a short time before the animal had come up out of the water—on its way down the mountain.

Was not this a trail that would lead to the bandit camp? He believed so, and determined to follow it up.

The brook was not deep, and stepping noiselessly into it, he crossed over to the other side and searched eagerly there for the place where the beast had entered the water. He could not find it, though he looked for at least fifty feet up and down the bank.

He now went back to the right side of the stream, and examined the track more closely. It had evidently been made by the animal as it leapt out of the water, while descending the brook. He decided, therefore, to go back for his own horse, and then, ascending the rivulet, keep a sharp eye out for the

place of entrance on each bank. Where the other horse had come from, his horse could go.

In a few minutes he was back at the stream, and began the ascent, finding soon that it did not come directly down from the mountain, but wound around the foot of the peak to its west side; and then it entered a deeply-wooded ravine—which formed the hollow, or curve, in that side of the huge Anvil. There had been as yet no mark that indicated the entrance of the bandit's horse to the brook, and the searcher remarked to himself:

"I have struck it now. This stream is the road-bed that leads into the new rendezvous. I must be cautious."

He rode out of the water and into the thick woods to think the matter over. Should he go on, or wait until the robber—who evidently had gone down the mountain—should return, and then follow him in? Would not his presence in the camp be more easily explained if he adopted the latter course? He decided it would, and making sure he was entirely concealed, he waited.

The forenoon passed, and half the afternoon, but he did not stir. Confident that he was on the right track, time was of no account. He could be patient until the returning brigand came.

But his patience was not to be tried much longer. Not far from four o'clock he caught the swash of a horse's hoof—faint, but positive. It grew louder, and he held his own horse's jaws to prevent it from neighing, as a man, heavily armed, passed, riding straight up the stream. When the sound of the animal's steps had died away in the distance, Felipe mounted his own beast, and followed the fellow.

For a mile the brook wound among the hills, its banks growing higher, and nearer together, until at length they were twenty feet high, and not over ten feet apart, while the sparkling waters rushed and

foamed between them, as though eager to find a broader channel.

Stopping only long enough to make sure that the note he carried was safe in the bosom of his shirt, the old native plunged into the chasm, and, though the water reached the belly of his horse, rode fearlessly on until the steep banks abruptly ended, and the ravine as suddenly widened into a broad and beautiful plateau.

Near the center of this plain were two log huts, side by side, before which a half-dozen men were standing, talking with the horseman who had just arrived; and Felipe had barely time to draw a white cloth from his pocket and hold it out as a flag of truce, when his coming was discovered.

Immediately the bandits flocked around him, flourishing their weapons, and crying in chorus:

"Who are you? What do you want? Speak quick, or we'll cut you down!" and drawn machetes were whirled alarmingly close to the newcomer's head.

"I have a message for Captain Larkin," Felipe announced, coolly. "Take me to your leader."

His cool assumption and fearless attitude led the horde to sheathe their weapons, and they escorted him to the huts. Then a huge fellow of perhaps forty years of age, whose belt bristled with weapons, and whose face spoke of cunning cruelty, came to the door of the larger building, asking:

"What is it, men?"

"A messenger for Captain Larkin," they answered, stepping back and allowing their chief to face the old interpreter.

For a moment the gefe stared at the old man, then he questioned sharply:

"How did you find your way here?"

"By following your courier up the brook," Felipe answered, pleasantly.

"Who are you? What do you want? Speak quick or we'll cut you down!"—Page 212. *Yankee Lad's Pluck.*

"Who sent you?"

"Captain Larkin's son; here is a letter from him," and the manuscript was handed over.

The leader looked it over.

"Bah! it is in English!" he remarked in evident disgust. Then to one of his men he said: "Bring the prisoners here."

The fellow addressed went to the smaller cabin, and returned with the two Americans at his heel, both apparently well and hearty. As they caught sight of the messenger they cried simultaneously:

"Why, Felipe, what means it? How came you here?" and, unhindered by their captors, they shook hands heartily with the old native.

"That explains," was his brief reply to their questions, pointing towards the missive which the chief held.

The bandit passed it to Captain Larkin, saying:

"Read it to me."

"Thank God!" was the captain's exclamation as he glanced at the letter; then he translated it into Spanish. As the reader already knows, it told of Bert's escape, of Don José's capture, of the lad's whereabouts, and of his desire to arrange with the brigands for the release of their prisoners.

The silence that for a minute or two followed the reading was broken by Jack Barnes saying in evident pride:

"Captain, doesn't that back up what I said about the boy? I told you he'd prove too smart for any company of Spaniards you could scare up. If the ocean wasn't big enough to kill him, how 'd you expect a Spanish Don and Colonel could do it?"

Then he asked Felipe for a cigarette as coolly as if he was the leader of the gang instead of its prisoner.

"What does young Larkin propose?" the chief bandit now inquired.

"To exchange the Don for those fellows," Felipe replied, pointing towards the Americans. "He thought you'd give a little extra to have the traitor in your hands."

There was an insinuation in the latter sentence which caused the surrounding men to exclaim excitedly:

"Wouldn't we though, gefe? Just turn him over to us," and their hands dropped instinctively down upon the handles of their machetes.

"We must think this over, my men," the leader said at length. "Disarm the messenger, and let him go with the other prisoners for the night."

His order was immediately obeyed, and five minutes thereafter Felipe, despite his protest that he came under a flag of truce and should be allowed to depart, found himself shut up in a log hut with the two men he had hoped to rescue.

"This is rough on you, old friend," Captain Larkin remarked when they were alone, speaking in English so that the guard, whom he knew was constantly kept outside, should not understand.

"Not at all!" replied the faithful fellow with a laugh. "I wanted a long interview with you, and can now have it without fear of interruption;" he then told of the thrilling events that had transpired since he first met Bert at the fortress.

"May God bless you!" the captain exclaimed when he had finished. "If I ever get out of this you shall not lose anything for your brave acts."

"I want nothing, Captain, but the chance to serve you. Long years ago you came to my help, and I told you then Felipe Peregrino would not forget it. This is only the proof that I meant what I said."

Again the officer grasped the old interpreter's hand in a hearty shake, then the latter inquired:

"How have the brigands used you and Mr. Barnes?"

"Fairly well on the whole," Captain Larkin responded. "They were quite strict with us until Don José brought in my son's letter. When he had gone I called in Juan, the chief, whom I once employed, and read him the part that related to the Spaniard's scheme and treachery. He knew enough of the plot to see—now that he was told of it—how he and his men were only the tools of the man who was seeking my property, and that his and their lives would be worth no more than my own, when once the Don had accomplished his purpose.

"Barnes and I knew of this retreat, having once come up in here prospecting. We told the bandit chief of it, and, during the time Don José allowed me to decide what I would do to save my boy, his men were building these cabins. An hour after the Spaniard left the other rendezvous, promising to bring Bert to me, we had removed here."

"Juan also kept watch over the mansion house, and knew when Don José rode away with a Spanish orderly for Humacao, but supposed he had only gone for the lad, and would be back in a day or two. His object was, of course, to seize both the Don and the boy before the soldiers arrived, and then make the best terms he could for himself and his followers with me."

This escape of Bert and the capture of the chief plotter changes the whole aspect of the affair, and I wonder a little myself what Juan's decision will be. But none of the bandits have any real animosity against either Barnes or myself, and once sure they can save their own necks, we shall have no difficulty in arranging for our release."

"The lad is safe any way, and with the liability of the English consul stirring up the authorities in San Juan against Colonel Luzares, he is not likely to make us much trouble. Really, Felipe, I am quite sure our sojourn here in the mountains will soon be

a thing of the past, and I shall be able to clasp my dear boy in my arms. How I love him!"

The next morning the leader of the band held a long talk with his prisoners. He freely admitted that the easiest way out of the whole affair for himself and followers seemed to be the exchange of the three men for Don José; but he did not see just how that could be arranged and the gang not captured.

"I shall keep you all a few days longer," he finally said, "until I can investigate the situation for myself. But you will be well treated, and allowed the freedom of the plateau during a portion of each day."

An hour later he, accompanied by one of his men who had appropriated Felipe's horse, rode off down the stream.

He was gone five days, and when he returned he was not only alone, but seemed greatly troubled about something.

The prisoners were instantly ordered into their hut, and the door was securely barricaded from without. What then took place the imprisoned men could only judge by the sounds they heard, for they saw nothing.

There was first a prolonged discussion near the large hut; then the sound of horses being saddled and bridled and fastened close at hand as though ready for immediate use; then the noise of the preparing and eating of a meal, in which the prisoners were either purposely or thoughtlessly forgotten; then there came the clear and unmistakable evidence of a hurried departure.

"They have deserted us," said Captain Larkin.

"Yes, and left us fastened in," growled Barnes.

"We can dig out," Felipe suggested.

"If we have to," replied the captain. "My opinion is that friends are near."

As if in answer to his thought there came at that moment the sharp crack of rifles from down the ravine.

It was followed in a few minutes by the sound of rushing horses—a small number at first—then a larger body a moment after—then a short conflict close at hand with pistols and machetes; and finally a shout of victory in good old English.

"They are ours, boys! Throw open the huts, and release the prisoners!"

Then the props were taken from the door, and the three men rushed out, only to stop, and stare in amazement, at what they saw and heard.

A squad of American horsemen was in the clearing! The Stars and Stripes floated proudly from the staff the color-sergeant bore! And, as the liberated men appeared, three rousing cheers burst from the lips of the troopers; "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The liberators were United States soldiers!

Not all, however. In the front rank of the uniformed men was a lad in the dress of a planter, who immediately leaped from his horse, and, rushing forward, sprung into Captain Larkin's arms.

"My father!" he cried. "My dear father!"

The captain hugged the youth to his breast, murmuring: "My boy! My dear boy!"

Father and son had met.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAJOR GREENE'S PROPOSAL.

"I say, Captain, can't you let up on the youngster a little? I want to hug him some myself!" Mr. Barnes exclaimed the next minute.

"Of course he can," Bert himself immediately answered; and, released from his father's loving embrace, he now shook hands heartily, first with the sailor, and then with old Felipe.

"I'm glad to see you all, and we've lots to tell each other," he then said; "but I have an old friend here to introduce first. Jack, who is this?"

At the lad's words, Major Greene came forward, and endured the old seaman's scrutiny with a pleasant smile upon his face.

"Well now, if it isn't Lawyer Greene! all dressed up in regimentals, too! I say, squire, I'm real glad to see you! How is your wife and little daughter? And when did you come to the island?" Mr. Barnes rattled on in rapturous delight, grasping the officer's outstretched hand.

Then Captain Larkin and the old interpreter, in turn, were introduced to the major, and, with a little explanation on the part of Bert, soon understood who this old acquaintance was.

"I am very grateful to you and your men for this deliverance, Major Greene," Captain Larkin now said.

"It is a very small thing compared with the service your son rendered me some months ago," replied

the commander with much feeling. "I am the one to be thankful for this opportunity of serving you and him."

"But, sir," he added a moment later, "had we not better remain here for the night? It will be dark before we can get out of the gorge, and my men have already been some hours in the saddle."

"Certainly," Captain Larkin responded. "I do not know how well off the bandits were for food, but I presume we shall find enough to furnish at least a bite for all."

"We brought rations with us, in preparation for a prolonged siege of this rendezvous should it prove necessary, and so shall get along nicely," the officer explained. Then he gave the order for his men to go into camp.

In a short time the plateau was sparkling with camp-fires; and the appetizing odor of hot coffee and fried meats filled the air.

The small hut was turned into a guard-house for the captured robbers, and there all but two of the infamous gang were soon imprisoned. The exceptions were Juan, the chief, and his trusty lieutenant; they had been killed in the brief fight with the troops, preferring to fall in battle rather than die as felons.

The large cabin became the headquarters for the officers and their friends. A fair supply of provisions was found in storage there, and, added to what the soldiers had brought, enabled all to feast sumptuously.

Rude brush shelters were quickly constructed for the troops, and it was not long before the tired men had eaten, and rolled up in their blankets for the night.

But at the big hut it was quite different. Captain Larkin, Mr. Barnes, Old Felipe, and Bert, all had thrilling stories to tell; and Major Greene and his

officers listened in astonishment to the experiences which each in turn related.

"Who would ever have thought, when you bade me good-by in my parlor last September, Bert, that you were to encounter such perils on land and sea as you have?" the major remarked, after he had heard all. "It sounds like a wild romance. I don't know but I shall have to pinch myself to make sure that I'm not dreaming."

"Is any of it more improbable than what you yourself have passed through, sir?" the lad retorted. "Suppose you had been told at the same time that in less than a year war would exist between the States and Spain, and you would be here in this island in command of a battalion of the American forces, would you have believed it?"

"I reckon not," admitted the officer, laughingly. He knew the boy had fairly turned the tables on him.

The next morning, while breakfast was preparing, the major, Captain Larkin, Mr. Barnes and Bert went out for a short walk. Their course led them across a little plateau, and then up to the head of the ravine, where the brook came dashing down from the mountain top.

It was a pretty sight. From some spring, hidden among the overhanging cliffs, the clear water first bubbled forth; then, leaping from rock to rock, it descended into a small basin at the foot of the precipice; from here it ran off down the ravine, across the plateau, through the gorge, and then, swollen by the inpouring of other streams, swept into the great valley below—already quite a river.

"Up yonder towers the highest peak of the island," Captain Larkin remarked, pointing to the sharp point of The Anvil. "I've often thought I should like to ascend it; but it cannot be done from this side."

"We can make a special trip up here, just for that, some day, father," Bert suggested. "I should like nothing better. But does your ranch come up as far as this?"

"Yes," the captain replied; "my deeds cover all this end of the peak, and also the south side as far as the ridge from which you caught your first view of the plantation."

"Major Greene, what would they think of such a farm as this in the States?" the lad inquired, with sparkling eyes. He was glad his friend could know of the vast extent of the hacienda.

"We should have to go into the west to find anything like it, my boy," he responded, somewhat absently, however. His eyes were studying the surrounding ledges, and the general configuration of the ravine. The next instant he said:

"But for its tropical verdure, this whole locality reminds me of a mining region in the west, where I own some property. Have you ever prospected here for gold, Captain Larkin?"

"Only to a limited extent," he answered. "Small nuggets have sometimes been found by the natives in this stream, below the gorge; and Jack and I came up here one day and looked about a little. Neither one of us is an expert mineralogist, however, and we discovered nothing that promised value."

"Yet it is generally believed that gold, as well as coal, and iron, and copper, is to be found in this island in paying quantities," the officer remarked, musingly.

"I know it," Captain Larkin admitted. "The mineral deposits here, as in Cuba, have been allowed to go undeveloped under the Spanish rule. But, with the Yankees in charge here, it will be different; their prying eyes will unearth and make profitable every ore these mountain ranges possess."

"Why should you wait for some one else to find

the treasures your own land holds?" asked Major Greene, significantly. "I know there are too many men in the gorge now for us to undertake a careful prospecting; but, as a friend, I would advise you to return here at an early date and examine the whole ravine systematically. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you will be amply repaid for all your trouble."

"I will certainly do so, and before you leave the ranch," the captain promised.

"What's that?" Bert suddenly asked, pointing towards a long, slim object that was making off over the rocks a dozen yards away.

"It is an armadillo!" cried Jack Barnes. "Come on, lad; we'll catch it!"

Over the rocks and boulders that lay at the foot of the cliffs they were soon clambering; and in and out among the ferns and bushes. The animal, however, had some feet the start of them, and led them a long chase.

When they finally came up with their victim, it, as is often the case with the armadillo when pursued, was using its long, powerful claws to bury itself between two boulders.

"We've got it!" cried the old sailor, as enthusiastically as a boy; and, catching hold of the long tail of the animal, he, with a tremendous pull, swung it high in the air, and then threw it against a rock ten feet away. The blow stunned the beast, and with a shout:

"Your machete, lad! Quick!" Jack rushed down upon his prey.

"There it is," Bert answered, tossing the weapon down towards the man, who skilfully caught it and transfixed the armadillo between its bony plates. As for the lad, he was interested in something else just then.

He had heard the conversation between Major Greene and his father about the minerals of the

island; and, attracted by several lumps, the armadillo had thrown out in its digging, he was now bending over and examining them.

"Come on, and help me carry this fellow to the camp, Bert!" Mr. Barnes was now calling; and, slipping the pieces he had picked up into his pocket, the lad went to his friend's assistance.

In a few minutes, bearing their ungainly load between them, and followed by the captain and the major, they reached the hut.

"Now we'll have some as fine steaks as you ever ate for breakfast," the sailor said; and, with old Felipe's help, he soon had removed the armor-like coat of the armadillo, and cut from its carcass the long, delicate strips which are regarded by most dwellers in the tropics as a rare tidbit.

Some of the officers were too fastidious to partake of the flesh of the strange animal; but Major Greene and Bert did not hesitate to eat the crisp and tender steaks, and pronounced them superior to the finest pork.

Breakfast over, the camp was broken, and soon the cavalcade, with its prisoners, was traveling down the mountain towards the mansion house. In two hours they reached it, and Captain Larkin and Mr. Barnes were greeted by the assembled peasants with every demonstration of joy.

In a stout building, near the main dwelling, the bandits were placed with a strong guard to watch over them; and almost immediately a half-dozen soldiers, under command of a sergeant, and with old Felipe as a guide, were sent over the range to the Swallow plantation to secure Don José.

The squad returned the next day without the plotter; and Mr. Swallow, who accompanied the men, told a strange story of the schemer's fate.

After Bert left the Englishman's ranch for his trip across the island, Mrs. Swallow became so

nervous over the presence of the arch-conspirator in the house that her husband fitted up a stout hut a half-mile from the mansion, and confined the Don there under a strong guard. Night and day two heavily armed men watched over the prisoner.

Notwithstanding these precautions, however, the sentinels were surprised one night, and Don José was carried away.

The overpowered men had been struck from behind by blows that rendered them unconscious, and they could therefore give no description of their assailants. It was consequently believed at first that friends of the imprisoned man had rescued him.

But before the day was over this view of the event was radically changed. For Don José was found hanging from the limb of a huge tree deep in the neighboring forest; while on his breast was a placard bearing one word in Spanish: "TRAITOR."

When Mr. Swallow had related these facts in extensive detail, Captain Larkin exclaimed:

"That was Juan's—the bandit chief's—work, and explains why he was gone so long from the rendezvous. Where is Sanchez, who was with him, and who guided you to the gorge, Major? Have him brought here; he doubtless can give us some light on this terrible affair."

The fellow, though not confined with the other members of the robber gang, had been kept under strict surveillance, and was soon found.

He confessed that Juan and he had released Don José and hung him to the tree.

"That was our first work after leaving the encampment," he said. "We hung around Swallow's ranch until we had located the place of the Spaniard's confinement, and then, watching for a favorable opportunity, secured him. Don José knew us,

and thought that we came as his friends. Juan, however, soon dispelled that notion, and the noble begged piteously for his life, promising anything and everything if we would only let him go. But Juan was inexorable, and, after charging him with his perfidy, strung him up on the gum tree. Then we went down to Humacao to settle scores with Colonel Luzares, but found he had gone to the southern part of the island. We were on our return to the rendezvous when captured by the Americans."

The man recited the horrible tale without the slightest emotion, and did not seem to realize that he had shown some of Don José's traitorous spirit in his own betrayal of his fellow-robbers.

"I believe I should serve you right, Sanchez," Captain Larkin now said (for he had been told that the man had agreed to leave his fate to him), if I should turn you over to your comrades, and tell them what you, of your own free will, offered to do in hopes of saving your own miserable neck from the halter."

The fellow gave a ghastly grin, but said nothing.

"What shall I do with him, Major?" asked the captain, turning to that officer, who sat near him.

"Why not state the facts at the trial, and leave the mitigation of his sentence to the discretion of the court," he suggested in low tones.

"I will," returned the captain, greatly relieved at this solution of the perplexing question.

As Sanchez had kept well in the background when the glen had been invaded, his fellow-bandits knew nothing of the part he had played in that raid. There was also no likelihood of his informing them of what he had done, so he was now confined with the rest of the captured gang.

In due time all were turned over to the local authorities of that district, and, in connection with

the four who were at the fortress in Humacao, at length received a merited punishment for their evil career. Sanchez, in the opinion of the court, had done nothing to mitigate his sentence, and so suffered with the rest. But the two innocent messengers who, with Bert, had been condemned as members of the band, were speedily released.

Before Major Greene could report to his commanding officer the results of his expedition, the protocol between the United States and Spain had been agreed upon, and all hostilities in the island ceased.

There was no need, therefore, for the American troops to return to the vicinity of Coamo; and orders soon came for the major to occupy the fortress at Humacao; nor was it very long before he became the military governor of that district under General Henry, who was placed in charge of the southern half of the island.

Before the orders came for the officer to proceed to Humacao, however, the prospecting tour up the gorge had, as Captain Larkin promised, been made. Nor did they undertake that trip without a good knowledge of what the result would be. For no sooner was the expedition suggested, than Bert produced the heavy lumps he had picked up in the armadillo hole, and asked:

"Major Greene, what do you call those?"

"Nuggets!" exclaimed the officer excitedly. "Where did you get them?"

The lad explained; and to that spot the three men—Captain Larkin, Major Greene, and Mr. Barnes—and the boy went on the following day. Their search was entirely satisfactory, and all were convinced that the precious metal existed in the ravine in rich veins.

This discovery led to new plans for the magnificent estate. It was Major Greene himself who made

the proposal. He had come over from Humacao, which had now become his headquarters, for a brief visit with his friends.

"Captain Larkin," he said, as they all sat on the broad veranda of the mansion-house, "I have a proposition I wish to submit to you. I make it because I believe it will, on careful reflection, strike you favorably."

"I shall be glad to hear any proposition you have to make," responded Captain Larkin, courteously.

"Well," the officer went on, "I take it that, with Bert in the States the greater part of each year getting his education, you will not care to be tied down here as you have been for the last seven or eight years. Why not then form a stock company among your friends for the complete development of this splendid property—its crops, its timbers, its minerals? Of course you will be at its head, and the principal owner; but with other interested stockholders it will be possible for you to run over to the mainland as often as you choose. Besides that, no one man can develop the estate as it is capable of development; while under a company every branch of industry possible to these vast acres —planting, mining, and manufacturing—may be successfully carried on. What say you?"

"That idea is not a new one to me," replied the captain; "but where shall I find my partners, Major?"

"Why, here is Barnes—the most valuable man possible next to yourself. Then I thought of Loomis of Montville; he's a square man, and an enterprising one too. Bert can tell you all about him. I hope also that I may be lucky enough to find a wee corner in the venture. We shall have no trouble to find others who will join us. I may say here that as I'm only in the volunteer service my regiment will be ordered home as soon as the island is formally

transferred to our government. Why not think this matter over, and, if it meets your favor, go home with me and complete the arrangements for the company there?"

"I shall not stop a moment to give you my answer," responded Captain Larkin, "I shall do it; and here and now I engage you as my attorney to form such a stock company as you propose, and in which I want you to have a good share. Jack, of course, is to be included, and such other friends as we may deem wisest on our arrival in the States. I shall immediately make arrangements also to accompany you home when you go."

Old Felipe and his young nephew Benito were secured as head-gefes for the estate; and, as Mr. Swallow consented to ride over occasionally and advise with them in the management of the property, it was expected all would go well during the temporary absence of both Captain Larkin and Mr. Barnes. For the old sailor, for reasons of his own, was as anxious to return to the States as any of his comrades.

So one bright morning in October—over a year since Bert left Montville—all found themselves on board the transport Chester homeward bound.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AUNT MARY'S SURPRISE.

It is a clear, crisp, moonlight evening near the last of October. Miss Wheeler is sitting before a wood-fire in the little parlor of the vine-clad cottage at Montville, looking scarcely a day older than when we last looked in upon her more than a year ago.

The sad tidings of the sinking of the steamer Alhambra came to her, causing her great anxiety, it is true; but, like Captain Larkin and Mr. Barnes, she, as one bit of news after another reached her, steadfastly refused to believe that Bert was dead; and that hope kept her from being crushed by what, to one of less faith, would have been an overwhelming blow.

Then came the cablegram from Nassau telling her that Bert was indeed alive; followed by his long letter, giving in detail his experiences as a castaway, and his arrangements for joining his father in Porto Rico.

She kept both messages in her work-basket, and, showing them to every caller, complacently remarked:

"Now that is what faith does. I always told you that the boy was alive. I believed it way down in my heart, and here is the reward! All things are possible to him that believeth! It wasn't that cork-jacket that carried the lad to that island; it was faith. It wasn't chance that sent those spongers there to rescue him; it was faith. He is with his

father before now, and I am happy in their happiness; but even their joy and mine springs from faith."

Two months and more elapsed before she received any further tidings; but she always had her own explanation of that long silence.

"Why Sampson has shut up the harbor of San Juan so tight even a letter can't slip through. Just wait until our soldier boys have taken the island, then I shall hear from Bert again."

In August her faith was again rewarded. A long letter came from the lad, admitting there had been some unpleasant experiences with some lawless fellows in the Anvil region, but, thanks to Major Greene and his men, the disturbance was over, and he and his father and Mr. Barnes were happy in each other's company and busy with their plantation duties.

"I will give you the full details about it all when I come home, auntie," he wrote; "and you will enjoy it more because you hear it from my own lips."

Other letters came in September and October, but not one said anything definite about the lad's homecoming. She concluded, therefore, that he would remain with his father until another spring. Nothing, in fact, was farther from her thoughts than that she was to see her nephew that fall.

She was all alone, too; for Sue Braddock had gone out to call on a sick neighbor. But though alone, she was not lonely—far from it. Her thoughts were her companions, and they were just then exceedingly agreeable.

She may not have cared to have made known those thoughts, but we may form some idea of them from the tiny piece of paper she held in her hand—or rather the writing that was on the scrap.

It had been tucked in with Bert's last letter—was

but a line—yet it was the source of all her pleasant reflections. It read:

"Miss Wheeler,

"Jack is willing, and is coming home when the lad does—as he promised.

"John Barnes."

Some one has said: "Loved ones are always nearest when we are thinking of them." It may not always be literally true; but it was so now.

The stage from Flanders Depot came creaking down the street, it stopped before the house, and wondering who had come, she arose, went to the window, and, raising the curtain looked out.

There was the carriage sure enough; and in the light of the full moon she could distinctly see two men and a lad alighting. Two of the forms she had no difficulty in recognizing, and readily guessed who the other was—though it had been long years since she had seen him. Bert, his father, and Mr. Barnes had come.

The next hour seemed like a dream. She never could tell just how she got the door open; nor how her guests came in; nor how she greeted them. She only knew that they were there; that two of them had certainly put their arms about her and kissed her; and she had a suspicion that the third one did the same. Whenever she looked at Mr. Barnes, however, he looked so innocently at her she could not find it in her heart to accuse him of having followed the example of her nephew and brother-in-law, lest she should wrong him.

All at once she sprang from her chair, exclaiming as naturally as if Bert had just come in from the store or mill:

"Good land, Bert Larkin! I haven't got you a bit of a supper!" and despite the declaration of all

the newcomers that they had taken supper at the hotel over at Flanders, and did not care for another, she flew out into the kitchen to set the table.

Miss Braddock returned at that moment, and with her help the meal was soon ready.

Bert had been perfectly honest when he declared he did not care for any supper; but when he looked upon the tempting viands, prepared by his aunt's own hand, the old familiar sight actually made him hungry, and he was soon eating with the relish of bygone days. His father and the old sailor were not slow to imitate him, and all were doing a justice to Miss Wheeler's cookery that delighted her heart.

"I tell you, ma'am," Mr. Barnes said when he left the table, "I haven't eaten anything so good since I went from here thirteen months ago. I not only believe you are the best nurse, but the best cook on earth. Any man would be lucky to call you his own."

There was altogether too much earnestness in his tones for any one to doubt his sincerity, and the blush that came to Miss Wheeler's cheek showed that she realized the man was speaking out of his heart and with no intention of flattery.

But both Captain Larkin and Bert long since knew Jack's real feelings for their relative; and were, therefore, in nowise surprised when a few weeks later he announced that Miss Wheeler had consented to become Mrs. Barnes before he returned to the island.

With that consent she must have also dropped all dread of the sea; for the arrangements between the pair included her accompanying her husband to the ranch at such times as his duties compelled him to make that his dwelling-place.

The day following his arrival home Bert went up street to meet some of his old friends. Almost the first one he saw was Sam Thompson. He stared at

the lad for a moment, and then ran across the street, asking:

"I say, Bert, did Cousin Jack come home with you?"

"Yes, and my father also," the newcomer asserted, scarcely able to repress a smile.

He was amused that young Thompson's first thought and only question centered upon his distant relative.

"Where is he?" was the next hurried question.

"At the cottage."

"Isn't he coming to see us."

"Perhaps so; but of course he wanted to see Aunt Mary first," said Bert, mischievously.

"I don't see what for," snapped Sam. "You and your dad have got money enough without your trying to keep Cousin Jack's from us."

This was too much even for Bert's good-nature.

"We have no desire for Mr. Barnes' property," he retorted, sarcastically; "and he can do as he sees fit with it. But in my opinion if you and your folks showed a little less anxiety about getting it, it would, to say the least, be more creditable to yourselves, and improve your chances of obtaining it," and having delivered this homely truth he walked on.

The next friend he met was, as it happened, Bill Ecclestone, who greeted him cordially, and asked when he had returned. Then he said enthusiastically,

"What a jolly set of adventures you have had since you went away, Bert! Your aunt has let me see some of the letters you sent her. But why can't you get a lot of us fellows together some day, and tell us all about it? We should like to hear the whole story from your lips."

"Perhaps it will be better to write it out and publish it," responded Bert, jokingly.

"Of course it would," agreed Bill in earnest; and then the two lads parted, neither one realizing they had given one who overheard their conversation a suggestion that would soon materialize into a real fact.

A five-minutes' walk brought our young hero to the house of Mr. Loomis. He found Ned at home, and soon the two friends were busy, not so much talking over what Bert had passed through since last they met, as planning for the future. For, making a confidant of Ned, Bert told him of the intention to form a company to develop the great resources of the island plantation.

"Your father will be invited to become a stockholder," he explained, "and, if he accepts, it is my father's idea that you and I be specially trained in some Polytechnic Institute for the management of the varied industries which will soon be established on the ranch."

It is hardly necessary to say that Mr. Loomis accepted the invitation given him; and in a short time Major Greene had organized "The Anvil Ranch & Mining Company of Porto Rico," in which Captain Larkin, John Barnes, Mr. Loomis, himself, and six other gentlemen of wealth and business ability were the members. And before many months under this new arrangement the broad acres, the fertile valleys, and even the mountain sides of the Great Anvil will be humming with activity.

With the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Barnes for the ranch, the vine-clad cottage was closed, and Bert, when out of school, divides his time about equally between what he calls his "two homes in the States"—that of the Loomises in Montville, and of Major Greene in Goodport.

Some say he is a little more partial to the Greene home, but this Bert stoutly denies. He says:

"Ned Loomis is my best boy-friend, and Ella

Greene my best girl-friend, and I love to be with them both."

Captain Larkin remained in the States until after the holidays, and then returned to the island. But it is his purpose to run across to the mainland every few months to see his boy; while during the long summer vacation Bert and his friend Ned will be at the ranch to keep in touch with its business life.

In this way both the technical and practical sides of their life-career will be equally developed; and in due time they will doubtless become the chief managers of the industries under the Great Anvil.

THE END.

LEFT ON THE PRAIRIE.

CHAPTER I.

AT LONGVIEW.

Little Jack Wilson had been born in England, but when he was quite a baby his parents had sailed across the sea, taking him with them, and settled out on one of the distant prairies of America. Of course, Jack was too small when he left to remember anything of England himself, but as he grew older, he liked to hear his father and mother talk about the old country where he and they had been born, and to which they still seemed to cling with great affection. Sometimes, as they looked out of doors over the burnt-up prairie round their new home, his father would tell him about the trim green fields they had left so far behind them, and say with a sigh, "Old England was like a *garden*, but this place is nothing but a *wilderness!*"

Longview was the name of the lonely western village where George Wilson, his wife, and Jack had lived for eight years, and although we should not have thought it a particularly nice place, they were very happy there. Longview was half way between two large mining towns, sixty miles apart,

and as there was no railway in those parts, the people going to and from the different mines were obliged to travel by wagons, and often halted for a night at Longview to break the journey.

It was a very hot and dusty village in summer, as there were no trees to give pleasant shade from the sun, and the staring rows of wooden houses that formed the streets had no gardens in front to make them look pretty. In winter it was almost worse, for the cold winds came sweeping down from the distant mountains and rushed shrieking across the plains towards the unprotected village. They whirled the snow into clouds, making big drifts, and whistled round the frame houses as if threatening to blow them right away.

Jack was used to it, however, and in spite of the heat and cold, was a happy little lad. His parents had come to America, in the first place, because times were so bad in England, and secondly, because Mrs. Wilson's only sister had emigrated many years before them to Longview, and had been so anxious to have her relations near her.

Aunt Sue, as Jack called her, had married very young, and accompanied her husband, Mat Byrne, to the west. He was a miner, and when he worked got good wages; but he was an idle, thriftless fellow, who soon got into disfavor with his employers, and a year or two after the Wilsons came he took to drink, and made sad trouble for his wife and his three boys. George Wilson had expostulated with him often, and begged him to be more steady, but Mat was jealous of his honest brother-in-law, who worked so hard and was fairly comfortable, and therefore he resented the kind words of advice, and George was obliged to leave him alone.

George Wilson made his living by freighting; that is, carrying goods from place to place by wagons, as there was no rail by which to send things.

Sometimes, when he took extra long journeys, he would have to leave his wife and boy for some weeks to keep each other company.

"Take care of your mother, Jack, my boy," he would say, before starting. She has no man to look after her or do things for her but ye till I get home," and right well did the little fellow obey orders. He was a most helpful boy for his age, and was devoted to his mother, who was far from strong. He got up early every morning, and did what are called the *chores;* those are all the small daily jobs that have to be done in and around a house. First, he chopped wood and lit a fire in the stove; then he carried water in a bucket and filled the kettle, and while the water was trying to boil he laid the breakfast table and ground the coffee.

When breakfast was over, he ran off to school, and afterwards had many a good romp with his cousins, Steve, Hal, and Larry Byrne, who lived quite close to his home. Jack was very fond of his Aunt Sue; she was so like his gentle mother. He often ran in to see her, but he always fled when he heard his Uncle Mat coming, whose loud rough voice frightened him.

Jack was very sorry for his cousins, as they did not seem to care a bit for their father; indeed, at times they were very much afraid of him, and Steve, the eldest, who was a big fellow nearly sixteen, told Jack that if it wasn't for his mother, he would run away from home and go off to be a cowboy, instead of working as a miner with his father. But he knew what a sad trouble it would be to the poor woman if he went away from her, and he was too good a son to give her pain.

When his father was away freighting, Jack, even while he was at play, kept a good lookout across the prairie every day watching for his return. He could see for miles, and when he spied the white top

of the familiar wagon appearing in the distance, he would rush home shouting, "Mother, Mother Daddy's coming! I see the wagon ever such a long way off," and then the two would get to work and prepare a nice supper for him.

Jack could help his father, too, when he arrived home, for there were four tired horses to unharness, and water, and feed. Jack knew them all well; Buck and Jerry in front as leaders, and Rufus and Billy harnessed to the wagon. George Wilson was very proud of his horses, and they certainly had a good master, for he always looked after them first, and saw them comfortably into their stable before he began his own supper.

Trouble, however, was dawning over the happy household. The life in the hot village had never suited Mrs. Wilson, and it told on her more as time went on. She looked white and thin, and felt so tired and weary if she did any work, that her husband got alarmed, and brought in a doctor to see her. The doctor frightened him still more. He said the place was slowly killing her, as the air was so close and hot.

"You must take her away at once," he said, emphatically, "if you want to save her life. She has been here too long, I fear, as it is. Go away to the mountains and try the bracing air up there; she may come back quite strong after a year there, if she avoids all unnecessary fatigue. Take my advice, go as soon as you can; there's no time to lose!"

These words came as an awful shock to George Wilson, who had no idea his wife was so ill, and had hoped a few bottles of tonic from the doctor would restore her failing strength. But the medical warning could not be disregarded, and he could see for himself now how fast she was wasting away. They must go away from Longview as soon as possible.

It was a sad thing for the Wilsons to think of—breaking up their home, but there was no help for it. They talked matters well over, and came at last to the conclusion that it would be better not to take Jack with them. They would be probably moving on from place to place, and in a year he would forget all he had learnt at school. After a long consultation with Aunt Sue, it was arranged that Jack should stay at the Byrnes' house, and keep on at his lessons; his Uncle Mat having given his consent after hearing the Wilsons would pay well for his keep.

George Wilson and his wife felt keenly the idea of leaving Jack, and it was agreed that if they decided to stay in the mountains altogether, some one should be found who would take the boy to them.

It was terrible breaking the news to poor little Jack that his parents were going away from him, and for a time he was quite inconsolable. His father talked very kindly and quietly to him, and at last made him see that the arrangement was really all for the best.

"Ye see, Jack!" he said, "the doctor says your mother is seriously ill, an' the only chance for her is to take her off to the mountains."

"Can't I go too, Daddy?" pleaded Jack, with tears in his eyes. "I'll do such lots o' work."

"No, my lad; it won't do fur ye to miss yer schoolin', as ye'd be bound to do if ye came wanderin' about with us. It's only fur a year, so ye must try an' be a brave boy an' stay with yer good Aunt Sue until we come back agin or send fur ye. We know what's best fur ye, an', laddie, won't it be fine if Mother gets strong and well agin?"

"Aye, Dad! That would be grand!" said Jack, brightening up.

"Well, it's a sad partin' fur us all; but there's nothin' else to be done, an' ye must try an' keep up

a good heart fur yer mother's sake, as I doubt she'll fret sadly o'er leavin' ye."

Jack promised to be brave, but there was a troubled look on his usually bright face as he watched the rapid preparations going on for the departure. The things had to be sold out of the house, as they could not take much with them. The sale at first excited Jack, as so many people came to buy ; but when he saw their furniture, beds, chairs, and tables all being carried off by strangers, he realized fully what the breaking up of his home meant, and it made him feel very sad.

There was a lot to be done. Jack went with his father to buy a stock of provisions for their long journey, and then they tried to make the clumsy wagon as comfortable as possible for the sick mother. Aunt Sue packed up, as her sister was so weak, and the trial of leaving Jack was proving almost too much for her slender stock of strength. All the same, she bravely tried to hide the pain the parting gave her, and for her boy's sake tried to be cheerful even to the last.

Alone with Aunt Sue she opened her heart, and received true sympathy in her trouble from that good woman, who knew well that the chief sorrow to her sister was the fear she might never see her little lad again.

"You mustn't get so downhearted, Maggie," said Mrs. Byrne, kindly ; "but hope for the best. I have heard the air in the mountains is just wonderful to cure cases like yours, and perhaps ye'll get quite strong afore long."

"If it pleases God," said her sister, gently. "And now, Sue, ye'll promise me to look well after Jack. I know ye're fond o' him fur his own sake as well as mine : but I'm feared if Mat gets one o' his mad fits on, he might treat him badly."

"Don't you fear, Maggie," returned Mrs. Byrne,

soothingly, "I'll treat him as one o' my boys, an' ye know I manage to keep them out o' their father's way when he's too quarrelsome. Besides, Mat knows as ye're payin' well for Jack, and that, if naught else, will keep him civil to the lad."

"I hope so," murmured the mother, sadly, "an' if all goes well, we'll have our boy with us again in a year."

"Aye, a year'll go quick enough, never fear!" concluded her sister, cheerfully, "an' Jack'll get on finely at his schoolin' in that time."

The night before they started came, and Jack, who had gone early to bed, lay sobbing quietly to himself, quite unable to go to sleep. Before long his mother came softly into the room and stood beside him. She noticed the flushed, tear-stained face on the pillow, and exclaimed in a grieved voice, "Oh, Jack, darling! Don't take on so! It'll break my heart if I think o' ye frettin' all the time."

"I can't help it, Mother!" cried Jack. "What shall I do without Dad an' ye?"

"Ye must think o' the meeting ahead, dearie. P'raps if Daddy does well in this new part of the country, an' I can get strong again, we may make our home up near the grand mountains as ye've never seen. It's so different from this hot prairie, fur there are big trees to shade ye from the sun, an' little brooks, called creeks, running down the sides of the hills."

"Aye, I'd like to go an' live up thar," cried Jack. "I hope you'll send fur me soon, an' I'll try an' be good. I do love Aunt Sue, but I'm scared o' Uncle Mat at times."

"Never fear, Jack," said his mother, putting her arms round him, "Aunt Sue'll see as ye come to no harm. But, oh! dearie, how I wish I could take ye with me," and the poor woman broke down and mingled her tears with Jack's.

But the boy suddenly remembered his promise to his father, and, knowing how bad the excitement was for his mother, he made a great effort to stop crying, and, rubbing his tears away, he said: "Mother! this won't do; I promised Dad I'd be brave!"

"You're right, Jack. We mustn't give way again. I ought to have kept up better. I must be goin' now, dearie, an' before I say good night, will ye promise me not to forget to say yer prayers every day, an' ask God to take care of us all till we meet again?"

"I promise," said Jack, gravely.

"An' ye'll sing the hymns I've taught ye, sometimes, won't ye, laddie?" asked his mother, softly.

"I won't forget," returned Jack, as he kissed her wet cheek, and then she went away with a feeling of comfort in her heavy heart.

"A year isn't so *very* long," murmured the boy to himself, and before long fell asleep.

Next morning his parents started, and Jack, after the terrible good-bys had been said, stood watching the retreating wagon until it became like a speck in the distance. At last it vanished altogether, and then the boy's loss seemed to overwhelm him. In a frenzy of grief he rushed off to the woodshed, and wept as if his heart would break.

But Aunt Sue guessed the tumult of sorrow that was going on in the young heart, and she soon came to find him and offer comfort. She was so like his dear mother with her sweet voice and gentle manner, that she soothed him in his trouble; and when she proposed he should help her to get the house brushed out and tidied up, he gladly threw himself into the work.

He was helping his aunt to lay the things on the table when his uncle came in. He had not seen the boy before, and even he felt a bit sorry for the poor

lad, so he said not ungraciously, "That's right, Sue, make him useful. There's nothin' so good fur sick hearts as work."

Poor Jack flushed at this speech, as it touched him on a sore point; but he saw his uncle did not intend to hurt his feelings by the words, and he tried to swallow the lump that would rise in his throat. The three boys came in for supper, and Hal and Larry looked curiously to see how Jack was taking his trouble; but he was determined they should see no sign of tears from him, and they did not suspect that the little heart was nearly bursting.

Steve was a most good-natured lad, rough to look at, but with a large slice of his mother's kind heart, and he now looked quietly after Jack, seeing that he had a good supper. He was very fond of his small cousin, who in return was devoted to him, and the big boy felt sorry when he noticed the effort Jack was making to keep up a brave face before Hal and Larry.

Very soon Aunt Sue suggested he should go to bed, which he was glad to do, and once there, he was so tired out with his grief he fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER II.

JACK IN TROUBLE.

Over a year had passed away since Jack's parents had left Longview for the mountains, and the boy was just nine and a half; but he was no longer the same happy little fellow as when we first knew him. Great changes for the worse had taken place, and misfortunes came thick and fast upon him.

He lost his good Aunt Sue, for she died, ten months after his parents' departure, of heart disease. How poor Jack missed her! His uncle very soon afterwards married again, and his new wife was a loud-voiced, harsh woman, who treated Jack most unkindly.

Steve, too, his great friend, had gone away, as he had long threatened, to be a cowboy, for he found the life at home unbearable without his mother. Hal and Larry, who had not improved as they grew older, took good care to keep away from the house, except for meals; and thus Jack, as the youngest, had to bear the brunt of everything. He no longer went to school, for his uncle's wife wanted him to wash floors, carry water, and go endless errands for her. Every morning and evening he had to look for "Roanie," the cow, who was given to wandering off on the prairie for long distances, searching for better pasture. When he had driven her home he had to milk her, and if he chanced to be late getting her in, he was severely scolded, and oftentimes deprived of his supper.

It was a hard life for the little lad, and many a night he sobbed himself to sleep as he thought sadly of the happy days before his parents left him.

There was another thought troubling him, and that was, *Why hadn't his people sent for him, as they promised?* Was it possible that they had forgotten him, or meant to leave him for years with Uncle Mat?

It was dreadful to think about, but there was no getting over the facts of the case, and Jack knew right well that it was long past the time they had said he should be away from them. Only one year! He remembered it as if it were but yesterday, but not even a message had come for him. He could not understand it, and his heart felt sad and sore as he often crept away to escape his uncle's drunken wrath or the wife's cruel blows.

One evening he could not find "Roanie" for nearly two hours, and when he got home, tired and hungry, he found Mrs. Byrne in a bad temper. She gave him a little dry bread for supper, and anxious to get away from her tongue, Jack stole off across the prairie for some way, where, lying on the short, burnt-up grass, he gave vent to his misery, and, burying his head in his hands, had a good cry.

Suddenly he heard the sound of horse's hoofs approaching him, and a great jingling of spurs as some one dashed up close to him and stopped abruptly. Jack looked up, and was surprised to see his cousin Steve, looking very smart and happy.

"Hello, young 'un!" he cried, jumping off his horse. "I thought it was you, so I turned off the prairie road to see. What's the trouble? You'll drown every one in Longview if you cry so hard."

Jack sat up and wiped his streaming eyes with his sleeve. "Oh, Steve!" he exclaimed, "I'm so unhappy. I'm glad you've come, for they're so unkind to me, and I'm beginning to doubt as Father

and Mother have forgot me. They've never sent for me."

"Don't fret, Jack," said Steve; "they haven't forgot you, never fear. D'you know," he went on slowly, "I've found out as they sent for you long ago, an' he'll not let you go!"—Steve nodded towards his home.

"*He!*" repeated Jack, in astonishment, "Uncle Mat! Why, he hates me, Steve, an' I guess he'd be only too glad to get rid o' me."

"Not he," returned Steve. "You're better than a servant to that woman, for she'd never get any one to work as hard as you, an' she ain't a-goin' to let you leave. I heard a tale from Long Jim Taylor as worked in the mine with Father, an' it's that as brought me home now. Father was drunk one day, an' let out about a mean trick as he played on your folks, an' you, too, for the matter o' that; an' tho' he denied it afterwards, I'm sure it's true, an' I'll talk my mind to him afore I'm done."

Steve looked so furious, Jack felt almost frightened as he asked, timidly, "What was it, Steve? Tell me what he has done."

"Well, then, kid, listen!" said the cowboy. "He never wrote to say Mother was dead, but gave your folks to understand as it was *you* as was buried; said as how you'd had a bad fall an' died terrible sudden, an' there was no time to get 'em over."

Jack's eyes had grown rounder and larger with horrified surprise as he listened to Steve's story.

"How wicked of him!" he cried. "But, Steve, I wonder he wasn't afraid o' their hearin' about it."

"Aye! and so do I," answered his cousin. "I believe, however, he has been meanin' to move to some other part o' the country an' take you. Your folks are settled a long way off, an' thinkin' as you're dead, they'll probably never come back here again, so he'd be pretty safe."

"What shall I do, Steve?" asked Jack, piteously. "I'll ask Uncle Mat about it this very night."

"Don't make him angry," returned the cowboy, kindly; "but tell him you have heard what he's done, an' you are bound to go to your folks somehow. I'll tell him what I think when I meet him in the street. I ain't a-goin' near that house with that woman there, so if you want to see me, come here to-morrow evening."

"I will, Steve. Good night," and Jack darted away.

Jack felt very brave and determined when he left his cousin, but his courage failed a little as he approached the house. The door was open, and as he drew near he heard his uncle and his wife talking loudly, and caught his own name.

"I'm not such a fool as to let Jack go back to them," he heard his uncle say, "in spite o' what Jim Taylor wrote sayin' he'd told Steve, an' the lad was so angry he was comin' over to make things right for Jack. The boy's worth fifty cents a day to us, an 'll make more afore long; so the sooner we clear out o' here the better, an' make for a part o' the country where we ain't known. I guess we needn't let Steve into the secret o' our whereabouts, if we can get off afore he comes."

Jack's pulses were beating fast as he listened to this speech. He shook with indignation, and at last, unable to stand it any longer, he rushed into the kitchen, exclaiming, "Uncle Mat, I heard what you were sayin', an' I must go to my folks. I thought as they'd forgot me, an' now I know they haven't, but you've told 'em a lie."

A look almost of fear crossed the man's face at first when Jack burst in, but it was quickly replaced by a hard and cruel smile.

"Listenin'! were you?" he said angrily. "Well, listeners hear no good o' themsel's, an' it's a mighty

bad habit to give way to. Perhaps a touch o' the whip will make you forget what wasn't meant for you to hear."

"Oh! don't beat me, please, Uncle Mat," cried poor Jack.

But there was no mercy to be had this time, and when his punishment was over, Jack, quite exhausted, made his way to his miserable bed, which was in a shed adjoining the house. Through the thin wooden walls he could hear the two Byrnes talking and planning to leave Longview as soon as possible, and he felt sick with fright as he heard them arrange to take him too.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" murmured the boy sadly, "what will become o' me? If Steve don't save me, I don't know what they'll do to me. But I'm glad I didn't say I'd seen him."

In spite of his aching bones, Steve's assurance that his parents had *not* forgotten him, as he feared, was a great comfort to the lonely little lad, and thinking hopefully of his interview with Steve the next day, he fell asleep and forgot his troubles.

CHAPTER III.

JACK'S RESOLUTION.

Jack could hardly get up the next morning, he was so stiff and bruised from the beating his uncle had given him, but he was not the kind of boy to moan and groan in bed. He dragged himself up and dressed, and after washing and dipping his head into cool water in the back yard he felt better, and soon got to work, lighting the fire and getting the things ready for breakfast. He rather dreaded meeting his Uncle Mat, but although the man looked surly enough he did not allude to the occurrence of the previous evening, and after breakfast, to Jack's relief, he left the house. The day seemed longer than usual, but Jack finished his work at last and hastened away to the place where he and Steve had arranged to meet.

His cousin was already waiting there, lying on the ground, lazily watching his horse quietly grazing the herbage near. He hailed Jack heartily.

"Well! how did you get on last night?"

"Very badly, Steve," returned the boy, and related how he had been treated. Great was Steve's indignation when he heard what had taken place, and looked at Jack's bruised back.

"Poor little lad!" he said pityingly. "He has been hard on you, I can see. He licked me once in a rage, an' I wouldn't stay a day longer in his

house, for I hadn't done wrong. I saw him to-day an' we had a terrible row over you. I gave him a piece o' my mind about the way he was keepin' you from your folks under false pretenses."

"Steve!" cried Jack suddenly, a ray of joy crossing his face, "I've got a plan in my head. *You* ran away from home, an' why shouldn't *I*?"

"Aye! but I was a big fellow over sixteen, an' you're a little 'un, not much more than a baby yet," returned Steve.

"But I shouldn't be afraid to try," declared Jack stoutly. "I might get lifts from folks goin' along the road."

"You're right there," exclaimed Steve. "It isn't such a bad idea after all. You're a plucky boy, for I never thought as you had the grit to make a bolt on it. If you're sure you aren't frightened to go so far alone, I do believe as I might be able to help you on your way a bit."

"Could you, Steve?" cried Jack. "Oh! do tell me how."

"Well! There's a wagon here now belongin' to some miners who are on their way to the 'Rockies' to prospect. I know one o' them, an' it would be a grand scheme if he would let you go along with him. Shall I ask him?"

"Please do," said Jack. "I'm ready to start any minute they want to go, an' I promise I won't give 'em any trouble. Oh, Steve, I must get away from here!"

"All right! I'll try an' fix it for you," returned Steve. "Wouldn't it be a surprise for your folks if they saw you walk in one fine day? I don't quite know where they live, except that they're somewhere on the Cochetopa Creek, but I reckon *if* you do get that far as you'll find 'em. I'll see the miner to-morrow. He's campin' t'other side o' the village. I guess he won't object to takin' you, as I'll

tell him you're a handy little chap. I believe I'd have gone an' seen you safe there myself, but I'm goin' to look after cattle down on the Huerfano."

"You are good to me, Steve!" cried Jack, throwing his arms round the cowboy's neck and hugging him. "I thought you'd save me somehow, an' I do love you so."

"There! that'll do, young 'un," said Steve good-naturedly. "Go home an' keep quiet, for if that woman gets wind o' our plans, it'll be all up, for she ain't goin' to give up a slavey like you. But look here! How shall I let you know if he'll take you?" as Jack was turning to go.

He stopped, and after a little more talking it was decided that Steve was to interview the miner on Jack's behalf, and if the man agreed to let the boy go with them to the mountains, Steve was to ride past his father's house the next morning and wave a red handkerchief as a sign of success.

They parted in great spirits, but both were too young to know what a great undertaking it was they were contemplating for such a young boy. Jack had no notion of the distance it was to his parents' new home and Steve's was scarcely less vague. Jack's one idea was to start off and find his Father and Mother somehow.

The next day Mrs. Byrne was in a very bad temper and was a great trial to poor Jack. Nothing he could do was right in her eyes, and being in a state of anxious excitement himself over the result of Steve's mission he made some trifling blunders which brought swift correction upon him, and many a time his ear tingled from a blow from her hand.

He was busily engaged in washing the kitchen floor when he heard a horse coming rapidly along the dusty road. He knew what it was, and, unable to resist the temptation, he jumped up from his

knees and rushed to the door. Unluckily for him Mrs. Byrne came in from the garden at that moment and met him at the doorway. Seeing him, as she thought, neglecting his work, she seized him by the arm and pulling him back roughly into the kitchen said angrily, "You lazy imp! The moment my back's turned, you leave the washin'. I thought your uncle had taught you a lesson two nights ago, an' mark you, I'll give you another hidin' as you'll remember if I catch you shirkin' your work."

But Jack cared nothing for her threatening words now. In the one glimpse he had got through the doorway he had seen Steve galloping past and waving in his hand the red handkerchief of success.

Hope sprang high in the boy's heart, and with a bright smile on his face he set to work once more at the dirty floor, scrubbing with a will. Nothing put him out again that day. He carried pail after pail of water through the hot sun without a sigh, although it blistered his hands, for there was a great thought of joy to cheer him on—"The last time for her!"

When he met Steve in the evening he heard the wagon was to start at daybreak, and Jeff Ralston, the miner, was willing to take him as far as the mountains if he were there in time, but on no consideration would they wait one moment for him.

"I'll be there, never fear," exclaimed Jack joyfully.

"This Jeff seems a rough, good-natured fellow," went on Steve, "an' he'll be kind to you I guess if he don't get drunk. He's like my Father when he is that, he ain't no use at all; but there isn't much to drink on the prairie, so I expect you'll be all right."

Jack was quite grateful enough to please Steve, although the little boy did not know that his kind-hearted cousin had given the miner some of his own

hard-earned dollars to secure his goodwill towards the juvenile traveler.

"You'd better get home an' to bed now," said Steve at last, "or you'll miss getting up in time. I hope you'll get through safe, Jack, an' perhaps I'll come an' look you up myself some day."

"Good-by, Steve, I won't ever forget you, an' I'll tell father an' mother how you helped me off to see them," said Jack gratefully, and after an affectionate farewell the cousins parted.

Jack went to bed directly he got into the house, but never a wink of sleep did he get. He lay quite still for hours, until the deep breathing through the thin partitions told him that the rest of the family were slumbering soundly. Then he arose and dressed himself. Making no noise and carrying his boots, and a blanket, which was his own property, he got out of his window quietly and in a few minutes was hurrying along the road towards the outskirts of the village in the direction of the miner's camp.

It was a starlight night, which enabled him before very long to make out, a little way ahead of him, a big prairie schooner with four horses tethered near by long ropes. Close up under the wagons he saw the figures of two men sleeping on the ground, and not wishing to disturb them he lay down near them to wait until they awoke. But his long hours of wakefulness had tired him out and he fell asleep.

He was aroused by a stir in camp to find preparations going on for breakfast. He felt chilly from lying on the ground, and was not sorry to see a nice fire of sticks burning near him. A man was putting a kettle of water on to boil, and as Jack rose up and approached him, he welcomed him in a gruff but not unkindly way.

"How do, kid? I didn't disturb you out o' your

sleep? Are you the young 'un as Steve Byrne came about last night? You want to go along with our outfit as far as the Range, don't you?"

"Yes, please," answered Jack. "I'm going to my father. He's way over in the San Luis Valley, up on the Cochetopa Creek."

"*Cochetopa Creek!*" ejaculated the man. "Why, boy, that's over two hundred an' fifty miles from here, an' you'll have to cross the 'Rockies,' too. Say, Lem," he called out, "here's an enterprising young 'un. He's startin' off alone for Cochetopa Creek. What d'you think o' that?"

"He'll never get there," returned his companion, who had been looking after the horses and came up at that moment.

"You're right, Lem, I do believe," said the first speaker. "Just listen to me, boy! A kid like you can never travel so far. Take my advice an' go back to the folks as looks after you here."

"No, I won't," answered Jack, sturdily, "I've started now, an' I ain't goin' back for no one. If you won't take me I'll go on an' walk. My father's sent for me, but my uncle wont't let me go. I guess he shan't stop me now."

"Well, you're a plucky kid, as sure as my name's Jeff Ralston," declared the miner.

"How soon is grub to be ready?" asked Lem, impatiently. "I'd better harness up the team while I'm waitin', as we want to get away soon."

"All right. I'll call you when I've made some oatmeal porridge. Here, kid, go to the wagon an' get out the tin cups an' plates."

Jack obeyed, and was so quick getting out the things he pleased Jeff, who remarked to him, when he saw Lem was safe out of earshot, "Look here! Ye're a sharp lad, an' I'm glad I promised Steve Byrne as I'd do my best for you. All the same I'm a bit afraid as to how Lem'll take it, for he can't

abide kids, an' I haven't told him as you're a-comin' along with us. He's my mate an' a terribly cranky chap."

"I won't bother him a bit," cried Jack, delighted to find one of his escort inclined to be so friendly, and hoping to be able in time to please the doubtful Lem.

Jack confessed to himself he did not like the man's looks at all, and when Jeff at breakfast intimated to him that he intended to take "the kid" along, he only received a disapproving "Humph" in return. Jack, distrusting the dark, sullen face, determined to have as little as possible to do with him while he formed one of their party.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK STARTS ON HIS JOURNEY.

The sun had not risen far above the horizon when the wagon started. The men very carefully extinguished every ember of their camp-fire before they left the place, by pouring buckets of water over it, as the laws were very strict on that point. Many of the terrible prairie fires are traced from time to time to sparks left by careless people camping out, which, blown by the wind, ignite the dry grass near, and start the destructive flames which spread and rush on for miles, carrying ruin in their track.

Lem sat in front of the wagon driving the four horses, while Jeff was beside him, both smoking. As Jack was afraid of being pursued, Jeff suggested it would be safer for him to ride inside the wagon for the first day or two. They had only got a few miles from Longview, when Jeff perceived a horseman riding after them, evidently bent on overtaking them.

"Lie down, boy!" he called through the wagon opening to Jack, "we're followed already. Get under the blankets."

Poor Jack obeyed, trembling with fright, and not daring to look out and see who it was. How relieved he felt when the horse came up close behind and he heard Steve's cheery voice hailing them, "Hi, stop!"

"Hold on, Lem, for a bit," cried Jeff, "it's the young 'un he wants to see."

Lem pulled up with evident reluctance.

"Have you got the kid?" asked Steve, anxiously.

"Yes, there he be," returned Jeff, as Jack's happy face looked out through the canvas curtains; "I guess we can take care o' him for a spell of the way; but though he's got his head screwed on right, an' he has plenty o' pluck, I doubt if he'll ever get as far as Cochetopa Creek."

"He's bound to go," said Steve, "an' I leave him now in *your* trust, Jeff."

Steve could not help laying a slight emphasis on the *your* when speaking to Jeff, for there was no doubt his face had fallen considerably when he perceived that Lem Adams was Jeff's mate. He had known *two* men were going, but Jeff Ralston was the only one he had seen the day before when he went over to the camp to negotiate on Jack's behalf. He had not thought of asking the other man's name, and now he was sorry enough to find that Lem was one of Jack's companions. Some months before, Steve had seen a good deal of Lem Adams in a mining town, and disliked him intensely, having found him a bad, untrustworthy man. Lem hated Steve too, and the scowl on his face was not pleasant to see as he looked at the young cowboy.

Jack had jumped out of the back of the wagon upon Steve's arrival, and now the latter pulled his horse round to where the boy stood, and leaning from his saddle he whispered, so that the others could not hear, "Look out as you don't vex that black-lookin' fellow. He's a mean chap an' hates me, so I'm feared as he'll plague ye if he gets the chance, but Jeff'll see as ye ain't bullied if he don't get drunk. Take this, lad, it may be useful, but don't let on as you have it." He slipped a small paper packet into Jack's hand, and shook his head warningly to stop his words of thanks.

Then calling out, "Good-by, Jack, keep a good

heart up, an' good luck go with you," he put spurs to his horse and galloped away.

Jack stood gazing after him until he was lost to sight in a cloud of dust; then, holding the packet tight in his hand, he remounted the wagon, and they moved on once more over the dusty road.

It was August, and the hot sun poured down its relentless rays on the prairie schooner and its occupants traveling slowly on, but Jack never grumbled. He was happy enough, knowing that he had started out on his long journey, and what cared he for the heat when he found himself moving along the same road over which his dear father and mother had traveled before.

But to return for a time to Longview. Jack's absence from his uncle's house was not noticed until breakfast time. When he was first missed, the Byrnes concluded he had gone to look for the cow, as there was no morning's milk in the place where Jack usually left it. A few hours later they were surprised to hear "Roanie," lowing near the yard gate, and knew that the wandering animal must have actually come back of her own accord to be milked. But where was Jack? Roanie's arrival caused quite a stir. Mat Byrne began to think something was wrong, and he and the two boys sallied forth to look for the truant in the village.

They asked various people, and no one had seen Jack, and though they hunted about well, they could not find him. His uncle got very angry, and vowed to pay him out when he caught him again.

Luckily for Jack his uncle never once supposed so young a boy would think of running away, and he made sure that by evening Jack would return to his house hungry and repentant.

He, at first, thought he would find Jack with his own son, Steve, and therefore was greatly surprised to see the latter riding carelessly about the village

all day. Steve rode past him giving him an indifferent nod, and his father little thought how closely the cowboy was watching every movement he made.

Never for one moment did Mat Byrne connect Jack's disappearance with the departure of the two miners that morning, and when it dawned on the searchers the next day, after having ransacked every shed and building in Longview, that they must look further afield for the missing boy, our fugitive was too far away to fear recapture. Byrne made many inquiries from incoming travelers, as to whether they had seen a boy anywhere along the different roads, but thanks to Jeff's precautions, not a soul passing their wagon had seen the small boy hiding under the blankets, and unable to get any clue to the direction Jack had gone in, his uncle was at last obliged to give up the search.

For three or four days Jack was very careful to keep out of sight, but as they got farther away from Longview he felt safer and breathed more freely. He was always glad when they stopped to camp for the night, as his legs got very cramped in the wagon. If possible, they halted each time near some spring or creek of water, where they could get plenty for man and beast to drink.

As a rule every one had his own work allotted to him, and, knowing what each one had to do, this saved all confusion when forming their camps. Lem looked after the four horses, unharnessed them, watered them, gave them their feeds and picketed them out where the grass grew most plentifully. Jeff was cook, and Jack helped them both. Jeff found him most useful. He collected fir-cones and bits of pinon or birch-bark to start the fires with, and kept them going with sticks; he filled the camp-kettle from the spring while Jeff fried the beefsteak or sausage-meat, and even Lem looked less sullen

when he found how much quicker he got his meals than before Jack came.

Always after they had eaten their food Jack washed up the things in a bucket, and put them tidily by in their places in the wagon, while the men lounged by the fire and smoked. Jack soon got used to the life, although it seemed very strange to him to find himself every night farther away from Longview, and getting nearer and nearer to the grand mountains which they could just see stretching along in a huge range miles ahead of them.

Jeff liked Jack better every day, and asked him a great deal about his people. One day he questioned him about his mother, and being a subject dear to the boy's heart, he launched forth into a glowing description of her, which quickly showed the rough miner what a good influence she had exercised over her little son.

"Well," said he, slowly, "I understand you now, my lad. Your mother was one worth havin'. But you say she taught you prayers an' hymns. I don't care about prayers, but I'm powerful fond o' singin'. Could you give us one o' your mother's hymns now?"

They were all sitting round the fire after supper, but Lem seemed half asleep as Jack and Jeff talked. In answer to the latter's questions the boy said,—

"Aye! of course I can. I'll sing you the one as Father liked best, for he used to sing it when he was freightin' an' campin' out as we're doin' now."

"Give it us, my lad," said Jeff, as he refilled his pipe, and prepared to listen.

Jack had a sweet young voice, and possessing a good ear for music, he had quickly picked up the tunes of his favorite hymns from his parents, who both sang well.

Delighted to please his new friend he struck up, "Forever with the Lord," repeating the last half of

the first verse as a chorus after all the verses. Fresh and clear his voice rang out, and when he came to the last two lines,—

> "Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
> A day's march nearer home!"

he seemed to throw his whole energy into the words.

The hymn struck home to rough Jeff, and when it was ended he said,—

"That's the way, lad. It's almost as if them words were written for such rovin' chaps as us. Don't stop. I like it. Give us another."

Jack was only too glad to go on. He sang his mother's favorite, "My God, My Father, while I stray," and followed it by many more, until his voice got tired. Sometimes he forgot a verse here and there, but he remembered enough to show Jeff that he must have sung the hymns day after day to know them so well by heart.

Lem had sat silently on the far side of the camp-fire, but as Jack ceased singing he said sneeringly, "Say! Jeff, you ain't been much o' a hymn-fancier afore to-night, I reckon."

"No, I ain't," returned the miner, quietly; "more's the pity perhaps. If I'd had such a mother to teach *me*, I dare say I'd have lived a deal straighter life than I have done. I don't remember my mother. She died when I was a babby, but if she'd been like Jack's, I reckon I'd have gone as far to see her as he's agoin'."

Lem grunted. In spite of himself he had liked listening to the boy's singing, but the *words* that he sang had made no impression on him.

Jeff always sent Jack early to bed, for the unusual fatigue made the little fellow feel very tired and weary towards night. He slept in the wagon, for Jeff had said after the first day, "Jest roll yoursel' up

cosy in there. Lem an' I are used to sleepin' on the ground an' like it best, but it's different for a kid like you."

Jack soon became attached to the good-natured miner, and he felt as long as he was present he need not feel in the least afraid of Lem troubling him.

CHAPTER V.

JACK GOES IN SEARCH OF "NIGGER."

For nearly three weeks the horses dragged the wagon slowly on over the prairie, and although it was very hot and dusty, Jack was as happy as a sandboy.

For some days they had made very short journeys, as one of the horses had rubbed a sore place on its shoulder, and consequently refused to pull at all. Lem at last had to tie it on at the back of the wagon, and arrange the other three animals in unicorn fashion, that is, one in front of two. This, of course, delayed their progress a good deal.

Jack was delighted with the novelty of all he saw, and a band of antelopes bounding away in the distance nearly drove him wild with excitement. One evening they came upon some cowboys who had just bunched up a huge herd of cattle for the night. There were nearly three thousand beasts, and it was a wonderful sight to see how a few men managed to keep so many cattle in check. The cowboys were stationed on their horses at near distances all round the herd like so many sentinels.

If an animal broke away, a horseman was after it at lightning speed. With a swift turn of his arm the cowboy would throw the lariat with a true aim over the horns of the runaway, and the sagacious horse, knowing what is expected from it, would twist round on his hind legs, and the jerk on the rope brought the fugitive to the ground. Some-

times the cowboys galloped round the running beast, and headed it back to the herd without using the lariat or long leather rope.

Jack and his companions camped for the night close to the cowboys, and Jack took a great interest in them for Steve's sake. They relieved each other like guards all through the night.

The way they rode was wonderful in Jack's eyes, and their horses were so well trained they turned whichever side their rider leaned over on, and if he wanted to stop altogether he just threw the reins over the animal's head on to the ground and it remained quite still.

There was great work next morning, as the cowboys made an early start, and the bustle was most exciting to Jack as he watched them standing or sitting in groups round their grub-wagon eating their breakfast. Then directly after, they tightened their saddles, and before long the gigantic herd of cattle moved slowly on. Such a bellowing they made, and the dust rose in a huge cloud behind them, in which they were soon lost to sight. Their grub-wagon followed them, and shortly after Lem got his horses harnessed, and he, Jeff, and Jack, taking their places in their prairie schooner, rolled on towards the mountains once more.

These mountains which were getting nearer every day, were a fresh source of wonder to Jack. He had lived all his life on the flat prairie where there was not even a hill to be seen, and he was speechless with surprise as he gazed on the snow-capped peaks in front of him, stretching up into the blue sky. Lower down the sides of the mountains the dark forests of trees spread for miles, and Jeff pointed out to him where the deep ravines or cañons were, through which the mountain creeks rushed down to the valleys fringed all along their banks with quaking aspens and cottonwood trees.

How pleased Jack felt to think that his new home must be somewhere in sight of these glorious mountains, and already the air they breathed seemed very different from the hot, close atmosphere at Longview.

One evening they made their camp for the night just outside a Mexican village. It was a very queer-looking place, and Jack stared about him in astonishment. He had seen Mexicans passing through Longview occasionally, and now he had come to a village where no one but Mexicans lived. The houses were not built of wood, like those at Longview, but were made of a kind of mud called *adobe*. This adobe was shaped into bricks and baked. The houses looked so funny. Some were quite round like beehives, and one thing that amused Jack very much was that many of the doors were half-way up the front wall of the houses, and when people wanted to go in and out, they went up and down ladders placed to reach the openings.

That evening after supper, Lem persuaded Jeff to walk into the village, leaving Jack, as usual, to wash up the things. The boy felt a mistrust of Lem when he saw how maliciously triumphant he looked as he strolled away from the camp accompanied by Jeff. He watched them as far as the village, and then returned to his work. When it was finished he sat contentedly down by the fire to wait for them. It got later and later, but his companions did not return, and at last, unable to keep awake any longer, he went to bed.

He fell into a troubled sleep, from which he was roused by hearing men's voices. Starting up, he listened and heard his companions returning. They were singing and shouting in a wild, boisterous way that struck terror to Jack's heart, for he knew from such sounds that they must have been drinking heavily. Their loud, rough voices frightened him,

and he lay very still inside the wagon for fear they should see him. He could tell Lem was in a quarrelsome mood, and trembled as they hunted about in the back of the wagon for their blankets, swearing and growling all the time. At last they sank into heavy slumbers, but all sleep had fled from Jack's eyes at the fresh trouble that had arisen for him. The two men were evidently given to drink, the awful curse in the West, and had taken the opportunity of a first halt at a village to satisfy their craving for it. It was a terrible thought for poor Jack, for he knew from what they had said there must be many mining camps ahead of them, and of course in such places there would be awful temptations for men like them, and his heart sank at the idea of being alone with such companions.

He lay awake for hours, and dropped into a kind of doze towards morning. He rose early and moved very quietly, fearful of disturbing Jeff and Lem after their night's carousal. He went to water the horses, and to his surprise found one had disappeared.

It had evidently dragged its picket-rope from the pegs that secured it, doubtless frightened by the noise in camp the previous night. It was the horse that had been led behind the wagon on account of its sore shoulder, and it probably was fresher than the other three horses and more likely to run away. It was unshod, and unfortunately there was no impression on the short, dry herbage, to show Jack which way it had gone. He wandered away a short distance from the camp looking for the fugitive, but, unable to see anything of it, he returned, and began to prepare breakfast.

Just as it was ready Lem roused up, and came grumbling towards the fire. Jack saw it was wiser not to speak to him as he looked very cross indeed, and the boy could not help wishing his friend Jeff

would also wake up, as he always felt safer in his presence.

They silently ate their breakfast, until Lem, looking over towards the group of horses, asked suddenly,

"Where's Nigger?"

"He was right enough when I went to bed last night," returned Jack, "but I found him gone this mornin'. I expect he dragged his picket-rope and got away."

Lem darted an angry look at the boy. "I believe you loosed him yoursel'," he exclaimed furiously, "to pay Jeff and me out, for goin' for a bit of a spree into the village!"

"I didn't," cried Jack indignantly; "I wouldn't do such a mean trick nohow."

"I don't believe you, there!" declared Lem, insultingly. "I can't abide kids, an' I wouldn't trust one of 'em anywhere. I was mad when I heard as Jeff was bent on bringin' you along with us."

In vain Jack protested he knew nothing about the horse's escape. Lem's temper was bad from the effects of his drinking bout, and as ill-luck would have it, the boy was the victim of it.

"Look here, kid," he said sternly, "it was your business to see to them creatures when we were gone away, an' I guess you'll skip out an' find that there 'Nigger' as quick as you can. Not a step on with us do you go, till he's brought back again!"

"I've looked all round the camp this mornin'," said Jack dolefully, "but I haven't seen no tracks of him. Would you let me get on 'Yankee Boy' an' ride over to that clump of trees over there?"

"No! I guess you can walk that far," returned Lem, "an' I reckon you'd better not come back again without the horse. I mayhap would like to ride 'Yankee Boy' mysel' an' have a look round."

Poor Jack! He looked wistfully at the recumbent figure of Jeff who was still in a deep slumber, and the lad, seeing there was no help for it, had to put the best face he could on the matter, and sally forth. He carried a long leather rope to catch the horse with, and walked towards the trees, which were about a couple of miles from the camp.

As he approached them, he noticed they were growing at the entrance of a deep ravine that ran back towards the mountains with a creek running through it. It was a very rough place; boulders lay strewed about, but here and there were patches of grass which looked so much fresher and greener than what grew on the prairie that Jack noticed the difference. It also struck him that the grass looked as if it had been freshly trampled, and in a moment the idea flashed into his mind that "Nigger" had without doubt wandered up the ravine. Jack never hesitated a moment, but started to follow up the tracks he saw so plainly. It was a pleasant change from the hot prairie, as the trees shaded him from the sun, and he climbed steadily on over the stony path, hoping every minute to come on the truant. The ravine ran between towering walls of rock covered with piñon and oak-scrub, and completely hid all the adjoining prairie from view.

At last Jack turned a corner of rock, and saw ahead a small band of bronchos, or prairie horses. He hurried on hoping to find the object of his search, but, alas! "Nigger" was not amongst them, and his weary toil up the long ravine had been on a false trail after all! The wild ponies were scared at the sight of him appearing to disturb their loneliness, and scampered away up the steep sides of the precipice like goats, leaving Jack gazing sadly after them. It was a great disappointment, and tears were not far from the boy's eyes as, tired out, he sat down on a rock for a rest. It was no use

pursuing the hunt for "Nigger" any higher up there, and seeing it would be quicker to retrace his steps than climb up the sides of the rock, he turned to make his way down again. It was long past noon by the time he had scrambled out of the ravine and stood once more on the prairie.

There was no time to lose, and with many misgivings as to the reception he would receive from the indignant Lem, Jack hurried back as fast as he could towards the camp. He was afraid that his long and, alas! useless delay, might also have vexed his friend Jeff, which was a thing to be avoided if possible.

Ahead of him he saw the quaint Mexican village, but something strange had taken place in his absence! What could have happened? Quite puzzled, he rubbed his eyes and ran on faster towards the place where they had camped, and reaching it could hardly believe his own eyes when he could see nothing of the prairie wagon, or the horses, or the camp he had left in the morning!

CHAPTER VI.

JACK IS DESERTED.

Jack stood on the forsaken camping-ground, and the truth dawned slowly on him—his companions had gone on and left him behind! He noticed the still damp embers of the extinguished fire, and though there was every indication of their *recent* presence, not a sign could he see of the two men.

He was very indignant at this unkind way of treating him.

"That's Lem's doing," he muttered. "He's done it on purpose to spite me. I don't care much; they'll go very slow, an' I guess I can overtake them by night. I hope Jeff will be right again by then."

All the same it gave him a feeling of forlornness to know he was absolutely alone on the prairie. He felt very hungry, and of course there was nothing to eat, as all the provisions had gone on in the wagon.

How glad he now felt that he had a little money of his own; the precious packet Steve had given him. He took a quarter dollar out of the store and returned the rest to a safe place inside his shirt. He knew his road lay through the Mexican village, and decided to follow it, hoping to see a shop where he could buy some bread.

Lem and Jeff had picked up a few Mexican words, but of course Jack neither understood nor could speak any of the language. He lost no time in en-

tering the village, trusting to make some one understand what he wanted, but he had not proceeded a couple of hundred yards up the main street of the place when he found himself surrounded by a crowd of Mexican boys, all shouting at him in a tongue he did not know.

He tried at first to show them he was hungry by pointing to his mouth, but they only jeered and laughed instead of helping him. He got out of patience at last, and endeavored to make his way through the noisy band towards the center of the village. But the boys pushed him back each time, evidently thinking it great sport to tease an unprotected little lad.

Jack appealed in English to two Mexican men who were lounging near, but they seemed to enjoy watching the group of cruel boys tormenting him. Jack was no coward although he was so young, and after receiving a hard push from a bigger boy than himself, he lost his temper, and hit his opponent a good blow between the eyes.

This was the signal for a general outburst. The Mexicans are a fierce, passionate race, and the boys retaliated on poor Jack by all setting on him all at once. Jack fought hard, and dealt out many a telling blow, but they were too many and strong for him, and at last he found himself being hustled out of the village where he had entered it, while his tormentors formed a long line to prevent him trying to come in again. Bleeding and bruised, Jack felt too worn out and faint from hunger and the fight to attempt another tussle with the enemy, so, like a wise boy, he deemed "discretion the better part of valor," and, skirting the village, he recommenced his weary trudge along the road leading towards the mountains.

The range loomed up at no great distance in front of him, and the peaks towered up so high they

seemed to pierce the bright blue sky. But as the afternoon lengthened, Jack noticed that the sky was assuming a very threatening aspect. Big clouds came rolling up over the mountains, making them look almost black in the shadow. Jack went on bravely, hoping to reach some place of shelter before the storm broke, but it was getting rapidly darker and his heart began to sink at the prospect ahead.

Blacker and blacker it grew around him. Bright flashes of lightning shot from the murky clouds, followed by loud crashing thunder, which seemed to shake the ground, and echoed and re-echoed through the rocky cañons. In a short time Jack was in the midst of a bad specimen of a Rocky Mountain thunderstorm and no shelter near him! The poor lad was terrified and crouched near the ground, while the lightning played about him and the thunder roared overhead.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! I'm so frightened," cried the little fellow, and then he remembered his mother's words—"Ask God to take care of us until we meet again,"—an injunction he had followed every day since she left. Now he knelt down and prayed to God, Who rules the storms, asking Him to send him help and keep him safe, and felt comforted in his fear. Soon the rain began to come down in torrents, and Jack was quickly drenched to the skin. The rain, however, broke the power of the storm, and before long the thunder-clouds rolled away and the sky began to clear.

Chilled to the bone and tired out, Jack rose from his crouching position and moved on again, not knowing whither he was going. He had wandered off the road and was aimlessly walking on over the prairie.

He began to feel very queer. First he shivered and his teeth chattered with cold, and a few minutes

after he was burning hot all over. His head ached and throbbed as if it would burst, and a feeling of giddiness came over him at times. He tried to think what direction he ought to move in, but everything was buzzing and humming in his brain. He thought he heard people shouting after him, and suddenly imagined he could hear his Uncle Mat's harsh voice calling him! How it seemed to ring through his head! It struck terror into his weak, overstrained mind, and he rushed on wildly into the gathering darkness. Poor Jack! It was only the fatigue and hunger, combined with the soaking he had endured, that was bringing on an attack of fever, and all these pursuing noises were purely imaginary. He ran on, trying to get away from the mocking sounds which seemed to grow louder and nearer every minute.

"They'll satch me, I'm feared," he moaned in an agony of mind as he tore on, but suddenly his headlong career was stopped. His foot tripped, and he fell heavily, knocking his head against a stone.

"Oh! Mother, Mother, save me!" he shrieked; "he'll get me and take me back!"—and the next moment he lost all consciousness.

In the meantime our readers may wonder how it came to pass that Jeff had deserted his little friend, and in order to tell you I must go back to the time when Jack left the camp to look for the horse. Soon after he had set out for the clump of trees, Lem had saddled "Yankee Boy," and after riding a few miles, came upon "Nigger," whom he at once secured and brought back to camp. He then harnessed up the four horses ready to start, and as Jack did not return he grew very impatient, and while idling about doing nothing an evil thought took possession of him. What a good opportunity he had now to pay off an old score against Steve Byrne by leaving Jack behind? It was a cruel

thing to think of doing, but Lem was an unprincipled fellow who cared little who suffered as long as he got his revenge.

He quickly finished his preparations for starting, the last being to hoist Jeff into the wagon, where he immediately dozed off again, quite unconscious of what was going on. All day he remained half-stupefied, and as Lem drove the horses a long way before making a halt, it was not far off evening when Jeff discovered what had happened.

The indignation it roused in him cleared his torpid brain as if by magic.

"D'you mean to say as you've been and left the young 'un behind?" he demanded.

"That's so," returned Lem, coolly; "I found as he'd been at some tricks, so I guessed we'd get rid of him. I sent him to look for 'Nigger,' and skipped out afore he got back."

"I don't believe it," declared Jeff. "Jack wasn't a kid to play tricks, and I call it a crying shame to desert him. You daren't have done it if I'd known what was goin' on. I blame mysel' for it most, and I'm a-going right back to look for him."

"Eat your supper first, man, and don't be a fool," said Lem, somewhat staggered at Jeff's concern over his desertion of Jack; but the miner heeded him not. He mounted one of the tired horses and rode all the weary way back to the place they had camped at, but not a sign did he see of the boy. On the way he endured the whole of the awful storm, which he hardly noticed. In his anxiety he pressed on, arriving late in the Mexican village, where he made inquiries, but received such purposely conflicting answers to his questions about the way the boy had gone that he got quite confused, and in the end had to turn back and retrace his steps. He stopped at short intervals to shout, but no reply came out of the darkness, and at last he got back to the wagon

utterly wearied out, and as unhappy as a man could be.

Lem's surly voice sounded out from the blankets asking, "Well, I suppose you've got the precious kid all right, haven't you?"

"No, I haven't," returned Jeff, savagely; "and I'm feared as he's come to grief somewhere, for there ain't a house twixt here and the village for him to shelter in. I'll never forgive mysel' nor you either for this day's work, and the sooner we part company the better I'm pleased. I knew you were a cranky chap, but I didn't reckon ye were as mean as this."

Lem growled out something angrily about making such a fuss over a bit of a kid, but poor Jeff's conscience was at work, and he blamed himself over and over again for Jack's misfortune.

"It's the drink that has done it," he murmured, "and I swear I'll never touch another drop again as long as I live. But that won't bring back the little lad," he went on sadly to himself, "and I'm scared as a night up so high 'll kill him, with nothing to keep him warm, for it gets terrible cold towards daybreak."

Jeff could not sleep. He tossed about, listening to Lem's deep breathing.

"I promised to see to him, and I might have known Lem wasn't to be trusted. He did it for spite, I'm pretty sure, and nothin' else," he argued to himself; and he was right, as we already know.

He and Lem parted company on the first opportunity, and certain it was, from the day Jack was lost, Jeff was a changed man. He kept his word, and never touched a drop of drink. It was no easy matter to break off a long-indulged habit, but when he found the desire for it growing too strong, and felt inclined to yield to the temptation, he would think of little Jack sitting by the camp-fire singing

his hymns, and as the bright face of the boy rose before him, it would break the evil spell and the longing for drink would pass away. He stayed about for some days hoping to hear something of Jack, but he was obliged at last to believe that in all human probability the boy had died of exposure on the prairie.

"I'll wait till I know the truth," said he, "but I'm feared as his mother'll never see him again, for he's *dead*."

CHAPTER VII.

JACK IS RESCUED.

But Jack was not dead. When he returned to consciousness again, he was surprised to find himself no longer on the prairie, but lying on sheep-skins spread over a wooden couch and covered with a blanket.

He was in a rough kind of tent, and through the turned-back flap of canvas at the entrance, he could see the prairie. He could remember nothing of what had happened, and tried to imagine how in the world he had got into such a place. His head still ached badly, and, putting his hand up, he found his forehead was bandaged. He felt very weak and ill, but his surroundings were so strange to him, he tried to sit up and look about him. The effort was too much for him, and with a groan of pain he fell back on the sheep-skins.

At the sound he made, a man appeared at the tent door, and approached the couch. He was a fine-looking fellow, evidently a Mexican, from his swarthy complexion, but there was a look of compassion in his dark eyes that inspired Jack with confidence and made him feel that he had found a friend in need.

"Where am I?" he asked, feebly, fearing the man would not understand the English words, and his relief was great when the Mexican answered,—

"In my tent. I had lost some sheep last night that scattered in the storm, and while looking for

them, my dog Señor found you lying on the prairie. You were hurt here"—pointing to his forehead—"and I thought you were dead. I carried you here, and you were nearly gone, but I got you round at last. You've got mountain fever, and you must keep very still if you want to get well. Here, drink this."

As he spoke he handed Jack a cup, and the boy, thanking him, drank the liquid, which the Mexican told him was a kind of tea he made from the wild sage, which grew all over the prairie and was a grand remedy for agues and fevers.

Jack was suffering from the chill he received in his state of fatigue, and it was fortunate for him he had been rescued in time by the shepherd's dog, and had fallen into the hands of such a kind-hearted, sensible man as Pedro Gomez. He had lived all his life on the prairie near the mountains, and knew how to treat most of the maladies that people were subject to in that part of the country.

He saw Jack was excited, so wisely said, "I shan't listen to you for a day or two, but when you're better, then you can tell me where you come from. It was lucky I found you in time."

"Yes," said Jack. "I believe I asked God to help me, and I expect He heard, for ye see He sent you to me."

The Mexican listened gravely, and said, "I reckon you've got Him to thank for it arter all, for it was strange we should come across you, and not another soul near you for miles."

He then gave Jack injunctions to lie very still until he returned again, and prepared to go back to his sheep. He first called his dog and put him on guard.

"There," he said; "if you want me, just tell Señor. He knows more than many a man, and 'll come for me at once."

Jack looked gratefully at him, and said wistfully, "I guess ye don't hate kids, like Lem?"

"Hate 'em?" repeated Pedro. "No! My boss has two little 'uns at his ranch, and I've nursed 'em often. They just love to play with Señor, and want me to tell them prairie tales, when I'm there, all day long."

Left by himself with Señor, Jack prepared to make friends with him. He was not a beautiful animal, being a long, thin, vagabond-looking dog; but faithfulness was stamped in his honest, intelligent face, and Pedro was right in saying he knew more than many a human being. Jack was fond of animals, and made the first advances towards his guardian, but Señor was not disposed to be friendly incautiously. His life had made him suspicious of strangers, and he *hated boys.*

Like Jack, he had a rough time of it when he went to the Mexican village with his master, as dogs and boys invariably attacked him. He, therefore, avoided them, and at first deemed it wiser not to notice this boy, who spoke to him in a coaxing voice. He had stretched himself down on the ground near the tent door, and prepared to spend his hours of watching with one eye on his charge and the other out of doors.

Jack, however, was restless and lonely, and anxious to make friends, so he continued calling him in a caressing way, until at last Señor thought he might as well investigate him closer. Accordingly he rose up, and in a slow, cautious way walked up to the couch, and looked up in the boy's face.

Apparently he was satisfied with his scrutiny, for when Jack ventured to pat his rough head, he returned the friendly act by licking his hand. As Jack talked and caressed him further, Señor gradually threw off all reserve, and when Pedro returned he

was surprised to find the dog curled up on the couch, as friendly as possible with the invalid.

"Well, that's good! I see Señor has taken to you, boy," he said, approvingly. "He can't abide strangers as a rule, so I take it as a sign as we'll all get on right."

Pedro was a good nurse, and looked after Jack so well that in a few days he was able to get up for a bit and sit at the tent door. He was very weak, and Pedro told him it was madness to think of trying to continue his journey for some time.

When Jack was strong enough to tell him his story, Pedro proved a most interested listener.

"An' where are your folks now?" he asked.

"Over on the Cochetopa Creek," answered Jack.

"Why, that's way over t'other side o' the range. You'll never get across the mountain pass alone," exclaimed Pedro; "it ain't safe for a child to wander up there with no one near him. There's bears an' mountain lions, let alone the timber wolves! You'd be eaten, boy, afore you'd crossed the Divide."

Jack shuddered. He was afraid of bears. He had never seen one, but they had always been a terror to him.

"I'm terrible afraid o' bears," he said, truthfully; "but p'raps I'd meet some one going over as would let me go with them."

"You might," agreed Pedro; "but winter's coming on fast, an' it'll be bad getting over the range after November comes. You bide here for a few weeks with me until my boss comes over again, an' I promise you as he'll help you along a bit. He'll be right along shortly to bring me flour an' grub an' to look at the sheep."

And so it was decided that Jack should stay on with the Mexican until Mr. Stuart came again, when they would ask him his opinion as to the

wisest course for Jack to take, to get safely over the mountains.

Pedro took a great fancy to his little visitor, and the quiet life in the tent was very pleasant to Jack after his rough experiences. He was astonished at the Mexican's cleverness ; he seemed able to do anything with his fingers, and had a wonderful store of knowledge about plants, insects, and animals, which he had acquired by study and observation, in the long monotonous hours he spent on the prairie.

Jack's clothes which, at his start from Longview, were none of the best, had suffered a good deal from the wear and tear of traveling, and by the time he arrived at Pedro's tent, they were nothing but rags, and his boots were all to pieces. He was much distressed at his tattered garments, whereupon Pedro said he would soon make it all right for him, and proceeded to hunt out some buckskin leather, which he had tanned himself. It was quite thin and soft, and out of it he cut a suit for Jack, and sewed it together. When the clothes were finished, Jack was delighted with them. They were so comfortable, and the leather shirt and long fringed trousers made him look like a little cowboy.

His worn-out boots hurt his feet, so his friend made him a pair of moccasin shoes, cut out of a single piece of leather, which fitted him nicely.

Pedro was pleased with the success of his tailoring, and said, "There, lad, them clothes 'll never wear out, but 'll last until you outgrow 'em."

The herd of sheep that Pedro looked after numbered over a thousand, and as winter approached he began driving them towards a place on the prairie where there were corrals, or yards, to put them in at nights, and where a hut had been erected for his own use.

As long, however, as the weather permitted, he lived in his tent, and as Jack was much stronger, he

accompanied the sheep-herder and Señor to help with the sheep in the evenings when they had to be driven in. Although they never saw any one, Jack was never dull or lonely, as Pedro was excellent company. He showed him how to prepare the different skins of animals they found near their camp, and when Jack was tired of work, he and Señor would go off to hunt for chipmunks and gophers. Chipmunks were like small squirrels, and gophers were pretty striped little animals that played about on the prairie.

It had puzzled Jack very much to find a lonely Mexican sheep-herder could speak English so well, until he learned from Pedro that he had lived from the time he was a boy with English people. He had spent many months every year with his young master, hunting, shooting, or minding cattle with him, and thus had learnt to speak the language fluently. He said when Mr. Stuart married and settled down on his ranch, he wanted him (Pedro) to live in a shanty, and look after things for him, but the love of camp life was too strong in him, and he begged his master to give him a situation as a sheep-herder. Mr. Stuart had done as he wished, and he was as happy and contented as possible in his rough old tent.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT JACK LEARNED FROM PEDRO.

Some weeks passed, and still Jack stayed on with his new friend. The time had not been lost for the boy, as he had learnt many things which he had not known before, and which were very useful to him in after-life. He was quick and deft with his fingers, and Pedro taught him in a few days how to cut and plait long strips of leather into lariats and bridle-reins, and to make ornamental belts.

"I wish you'd teach me to throw a lariat like the cowboys," said Jack one day.

"Come and try, then," returned Pedro, taking down a long leather rope that was coiled round the tent-pole and going outside. "Now watch me. I take the rope up in loops, leaving the noose end out. Then swing it round in a circle over your head, quicker and quicker, while you take aim and try and throw it over the beast's head like that;" and as he spoke Pedro let the noose fall gently over Señor's neck, who was running past at some distance away.

He then put up a post, and showed Jack how to drop the noose over it. It was very hard at first to aim straight, but Jack had a quick eye, and after two or three days' hard practising, he made a very good attempt at throwing the rope in the right place. Day after day he went at it, until one never-to-be-forgotten morning he also succeeded in lariating Señor as he trotted by. This was a great

achievement, and quite repaid Jack for the trouble of practising so hard to accomplish it.

One place that pleased Jack very much was a prairie-dog village close by. Many an hour did he spend watching the fearless little prairie dogs, who came out of their holes and would bark defiantly at him like so many cheeky puppies, until the tears ran down his face from laughing at their antics. Sometimes, for fun, Jack pretended to throw stones at them, and the instant he raised his arm they would disappear down their holes as if by magic, only to peep out again in a minute or two, to see if they might venture forth again.

Jack saw a great many rattlesnakes when he wandered about with Pedro on the prairie. He was very much afraid of them, and no wonder, for their poisonous bite is often fatal. Pedro was so familiar with them from his childhood that he did not mind them in the least, and killed them by an extraordinary native trick. He would fearlessly follow a retreating snake, seize it by the tail, swing it rapidly round, and with a dexterous twist of his wrist, would crack it like a whip, and dislocate its spine. Being thus rendered helpless, the reptile was easily despatched. As a rule they tried to escape, but if by chance one showed fight, it was harder to kill, as it would twist itself up in a coil, shaking its rattles noisily, with its head out ready to spring and strike.

Jack had a boy's love for possessing things, and in a short time, with Pedro's help, had a small collection of treasures to carry away with him. He found plenty of rattles on the prairie, as the snakes cast their rattles off every year, and Pedro gave him a skin of a horned toad, a curious creature covered with tiny horns all over its body.

One day Pedro killed a strange-looking animal called a skunk. It was very handsome, like a large

black-and-white striped cat with a magnificent bushy tail, but it had such a disagreeable smell it made Jack feel ill.

"You surely can't skin that nasty thing?" he asked.

"Wait and see," returned Pedro, carrying the dead animal towards the creek. "I'll show you how the Indians skin 'em."

He put the skunk quite under the water and kept it there, until he took off the skin, as this process destroyed the strong odor belonging to the creature. Jack was very interested, and watched him until the skin was hung out to dry.

Pedro taught Jack to know some of the principal grasses that grew on the prairie. There was the bunch grass, the buffalo grass, and the funny sickle-shaped "gamma" grass, on which thousands of cattle fed, and amongst others, Pedro pointed out a terrible plant, the dread of many a ranchman. With its pretty white flowers it looked harmless enough, but woe to the poor animals who ate much of the plant, for it contained a deadly poison which had first the effect of driving them crazy, and ended by killing them. It was called "Loco," which in English means "crazy," and some people call it the "crazy-weed."

A great number of cactus bushes grew round the tent; some were quite big, with long arms covered with prickles stretching out, and others grew close to the ground, and Jack had to look carefully when he walked, or he would have got badly pricked.

Pedro was a grand story-teller, and often as they sat watching the sheep or working in the tent he would tell wonderful tales. When they heard the dismal howls of bands of coyotes or prairie wolves, he would tell Jack what cowardly creatures they really were; how they were afraid to attack strong cattle, but would persistently follow a weak, sick

animal for days, dogging its footsteps until the poor thing fell from exhaustion. Then they would pounce on it and tear it in pieces.

He would tell him, too, about the time when he lived on the Indian frontier, and had to help to protect the settlers from the bands of fierce Apaches, Utes, and Navajo Indians, who came making raids for cattle over the border, often setting fire to houses and killing the settlers. He described how the Indians had massacred thousands of buffaloes by driving them into deep ravines where they could not escape, and then killing them, not so much to provide themselves with food as to prevent their enemies getting them. It was cruel slaughter, and the result has been that the buffaloes are almost extinct now, where years ago they swarmed in vast herds on the prairie.

As Jack listened to Pedro's tales of wonderful escapes from mountain lions, wolves, and bears, he saw himself that the Mexican was right when he said it was impossible for a little child like him to attempt to cross the big mountains all alone, and he wisely made up his mind to stay contentedly with Pedro until he got the chance of going on further with some one else. He would have been quite happy with the Mexican and his dog, except for the great longing to see his parents, which sometimes almost impelled him to resume his journey at all risks.

CHAPTER IX.

JACK ARRIVES AT SWIFT CREEK RANCH.

Jack had been two months with Pedro Gomez, and the weather was getting much colder. November had come, and although the sun still shone brightly and warm in the middle of the day, the nights were terribly cold, and Jack was glad enough to have the extra sheepskins to tuck round him which Pedro brought out for his use. There had been one fall of snow, which quickly cleared off the prairie again, leaving the mountains clothed with white above timber-line. It was a pretty sight to see the contrast of the bright-colored foliage against the snow, for in the autumn the leaves of the oak-scrub turn a brilliant red, and those of the quaking aspen a bright yellow, all along the mountain creeks, making a wonderful mass of color.

One afternoon, Pedro called Jack out to look at the mountains. The sun was just setting, and its rays spread along the edge of the peaks, making it look as if the whole outline of the range had been marked out with a broad, blood-red ribbon.

"Look at that, Jack!" exclaimed the Mexican. "Ain't that a grand sight? D'ye know what the old pioneers called them mountains?"

"I've heard, but I've forgot somehow. It's a grand long name as I can't remember," returned Jack.

"Well, I guess ye'll bear it in mind after to-day, for they called it '*Sangre de Christo*,' which in Eng-

lish means '*Blood of Christ;*' and folks say they gave the range that name because the first explorers saw the mountains with that blood-red streak running along the top."

"I shan't forget it now, I'm sure," said Jack, gazing admiringly at the gorgeous scene before them. "*Sangre de Christo*," "*Blood of Christ*," he repeated, slowly. "I like that name for it."

"Aye," returned Pedro, "the old Spanish explorers gave nicer names to places than the new settlers have done later. Which d'you think is prettiest, names like Huerfano (Orphan), Buena Vista (Good View), Rosita (Little Rose), and Rio Dolores (River of Sorrow); or *Smith's Park*, *Taylor's Creek*, *Gibson's Peak*, and *Georgetown*, and such-like? Mr. Stuart was talking to me once about it, and he said it struck him as his own countrymen were mostly like them mentioned in the Bible as called their lands after their own names."

"I like the old names best, for it seems as if they had some meanin' in 'em," said Jack. "I never saw anythin' like them mountains at Longview, and I'm glad to think our new home is somewhere near 'em."

They stood until the glorious color had quite faded out of the sky, and then turned into the tent, sorry to see the last of it.

The next morning Jack was tidying out the tent, when he saw Pedro and Señor hurrying towards him.

"Here's the boss himself!" cried Pedro, in a state of excitement. "He's coming across the prairie in the spring wagon. Let's make up a good fire, as he'll be terrible cold after his long drive."

Jack helped to bring in logs, and they soon had a roaring fire in the stove.

"Pedro," asked the boy, anxiously, "d'you think he'll take me back as far as his ranch?"

"I'm sure he will," returned the Mexican, "and

I'll miss you sadly, lad. I believe I couldn't part with you if I didn't know as you were longing to see your father and mother."

"I've been very happy along with you and Señor," said Jack, "but I'm bound to go on to my own folks."

"You're right. You belong to 'em first," replied Pedro, "tho' I'd give a good deal to keep you. But now we must go and collect the sheep, as the boss'll want to see 'em."

They ran the sheep, with Señor's help, into the big corral, and waited there. The wagon soon rattled up to them, and Jack stood quietly by, while the newcomer warmly greeted the Mexican.

"Well, Pedro! how are you making it this cold weather? Hope you and the sheep keep fit."

"Couldn't be better," returned Pedro; "and how are you all at the ranch?"

"First-rate, thanks. If it hadn't been so cold, I'd have brought the children with me for the drive. But, hello! who have you got here?" and Mr. Stuart looked with surprise at Jack's quaint little figure dressed in his leather suit. As he drove up he had noticed what he thought was a young Mexican by Pedro (as Jack's face was tanned quite brown), but when he had looked again, he was struck with the intelligent look on the boy's face, and began to ask questions.

In answer Pedro said, "He's a little English boy who was left behind at Las Vegas by a mining outfit he was traveling with. He tried to follow 'em up, but got lost on the prairie in that bad thunderstorm we had about a couple o' months back. When Señor and I found him, he had an attack o' mountain fever, but I brought him to my tent and nursed him round. He's right enough now, and I thought may be, when you hear his story, you'd help him on a bit."

"What's your name, my boy?" asked the gentleman.

"Jack Wilson, please, sir," answered the boy, promptly.

"Well, Jack, you must tell me all about yourself when I come back. I'm going to look at the sheep with Pedro now, and I'll have a talk by and by."

So saying, Mr. Stuart went away towards the corral, leaving Jack in great excitement. He liked the look of this fine young Englishman, who smiled so pleasantly at him, and he felt hopeful he would help him. While the men inspected the sheep, Jack made himself useful by carrying all the small things out of the wagon into Pedro's hut, where the provisions were stored. He had to leave the large sacks of flour, as they were too heavy for him to lift by himself.

When the men returned, and Mr. Stuart saw how busy Jack had been, he said, "Well done, my boy! I like to see a lad make himself of use of his own free will. It shows he likes to work without being told. And now I want to know how you came to take up your abode with my sheep-herder."

Encouraged by the kind interest Mr. Stuart showed in him, Jack told his story in a simple way, from the time he first started out from Longview, to where he had been so opportunely found by Pedro and Señor.

Mr. Stuart was greatly surprised, as he listened and learned how far the boy had already traveled.

"Do you really mean to tell me," he asked, "that you started out alone with strangers to try and reach your parents living at a place nearly three hundred miles away? I'm astonished that you have got as far as this! Indeed, I can hardly believe it," and he looked searchingly at Jack.

"It's the truth, sir, all the same," said the boy quietly, but there was a hurt expression on his

open face, which convinced the Englishman, more than anything else, of his honesty.

"Well," he said kindly, "I shall trust you, anyhow. At first it seemed impossible to me, that a little lad not ten years old, would dare to go such a long, perilous journey alone, but your face and straightforward answers have satisfied me, and I will gladly give you all the assistance I can. I'll take you back with me to my ranch, but I'm afraid you must give up the idea of crossing the mountains until next spring, as it is so dangerous at this time of the year, very few people care to attempt it."

Jack's face flushed with pleasure as he thanked the Englishman, and although he could not but feel sorry at the thought of saying good-by to Pedro and Señor, yet it was satisfactory to make a fresh start towards home, after the long delay.

He made his little collection of curiosities into a small parcel, and when it was time to start, it was touching to see the parting between the boy and his two friends. Over and over again Jack thanked the Mexican for his kindness to him, and a few tears fell on Señor's rough head.

"We'll remember you for many a long day," said Pedro, "and don't you forget Señor and me."

"I'll come and see you again when I'm bigger," said little Jack, half crying, "good-by, Pedro, good-by, Señor," and the wagon rolled slowly away.

"Adios!" cried poor Pedro huskily, and turned away with a tear in his eye. He had got so fond of his bright little visitor, and, for the first time he felt really lonely in his tent, as he sat down to his supper the evening after Jack's departure. For some days he kept looking about at times, half expecting to see the well-known little figure playing about. Señor, too, seemed very disconsolate, and wandered about uneasily, coming from time to time

to look up in Pedro's face in an inquiring way, as if to ask, "Where has he gone to? I can't find him?"

It was a long drive to the ranch, but Mr. Stuart was so kind in talking to Jack, that he enjoyed himself very much at first. It was very nice driving so fast over the prairie, and his new friend let him take the reins for a short time, which pleased him exceedingly.

Once he saw a flock of big birds a short distance off, feasting on the carcass of a dead beast. He got very excited, and exclaimed, "Look there, sir! Ain't them eagles?"

"No, no, Jack," replied Mr. Stuart, "those are not eagles. They are buzzards, or prairie scavengers, and are more like vultures than eagles. They are nasty creatures, but so useful in carrying away and devouring all carrion, that the State authorities won't allow them to be shot."

The birds rose slowly in a great cloud as the wagon approached. There were about thirty of them, and they had picked nearly every particle of flesh off the animal's bones, which already looked white.

"The buzzards do their work quickly," remarked Mr. Stuart; "that beast had not long died when I passed it this morning."

But after a while Jack got very tired and drowsy, and by the time they reached the door of the ranch-house, he was lying fast asleep at the bottom of the wagon, rolled up in rugs.

As the horses stopped at the door, Mrs. Stuart came out to welcome her husband, and the bright blaze of light that streamed from the house looked pleasant in truth to the hungry and cold man after his long drive.

"I'm glad to see you back safely," said his wife; "how did you find Pedro and the sheep?"

"In grand form," he answered, "and look here, in the wagon! I've got a surprise for you and the children."

Mrs. Stuart looked at the bundle curled up and asked, "What have you got there, Tom?"

"A little English boy, who'll take your heart by storm when you hear his story. He's quite tired out, so I'll just carry him quietly in and not disturb him."

As he spoke he lifted the sleeping boy in his arms, and carrying him into a nice warm room, laid him on a sofa near a stove, where a fire was crackling merrily. Mrs. Stuart brought a soft blanket, and covered him gently, and as he never stirred, they wisely decided to leave him to finish out his sleep.

The tired horses were looked after by one of the ranch hands, and Mr. Stuart sat down to his supper. While he was eating it, he told his wife Jack's story. It at once roused her sympathy, and she said, "Brave little fellow! What miles he has come to be sure! We must do all we can to help him on to his people."

"Yes! But I don't see any chance of his crossing the mountains until next spring," returned Mr. Stuart; "It is very late now, and no one is likely to come past here who would go over the Divide at this time."

"That's true," agreed Mrs. Stuart, "so we must do our best to make him happy, and keep him here during the winter months."

"I only hope he'll find his mother alive if he does get to their ranch," remarked the Englishman dubiously. "From what he told me she must have been very ill when she left Longview, and I should be afraid the shock of his supposed death might have killed her."

"Oh! Tom. How dreadful!" exclaimed his wife, quite distressed. "I can't bear to think of such a

sad thing. I am sure the little fellow's heart would break with grief."

"Well! We will sincerely hope for the best, dear," said her husband, "and trust he will find her strong and well. She ought to be proud of her son, for it's a plucky thing for such a child to attempt a journey like this."

"Come and look at him," said the lady, rising and leading the way into the other room, while her husband followed her.

"Poor little Jack," she said softly, "and poor Mother! How thankful she will be to see him again, after such a long separation. Fancy, Tom, if it had been our own little laddie!"

Her heart went out to the sleeping boy, and bending down she kissed him lightly on the forehead. Jack stirred uneasily in his sleep and muttered "Mother."

The word brought tears to Mrs. Stuart's eyes as she turned again to her husband saying, "Do you hear that, Tom? His thoughts are with her by day, and he dreams of her at night. It is most touching."

"He is certainly a devoted little chap to his mother," said Mr. Stuart. "I wonder what the children will think of him?"

"They will be delighted to have a playfellow, and I expect they will never tire of listening to his adventures. We must leave him now till to-morrow," and with another tuck in of the blanket round the boy, they left him still undisturbed for the night.

CHAPTER X.

JACK'S VISIT AT SWIFT CREEK RANCH.

THE next morning Jack felt some one shaking him gently, and murmured drowsily, "I'm so sleepy, Pedro. It can't be time to get up yet," and then he opened his eyes to find Mr. Stuart standing by the sofa.

Jack woke up thoroughly at the sight of him, and remembering where he must be, jumped up, exclaiming, "Am I very late, sir?"

"No, my boy; but we have all finished breakfast, and as I felt sure you must be ravenous after your long fast, I thought it wiser to wake you up. You'll like to have a wash and a brush, and then come into the kitchen."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, following him, and after a good wash in a big basin of clear creek water, he felt quite refreshed and terribly hungry.

"There's the kitchen," said Mr. Stuart, pointing to a door; "find your way in there and they'll give you your breakfast. I must go to the corral."

Jack walked to the house and knocked shyly at the door before entering. Mrs. Stuart greeted him in a very kindly way.

"Come in, come in, Jack," she said; "I hope you are quite rested. I saw you last night, but you were so tired and fast asleep, we decided not to wake you up. We are very glad to see you here, and when you have had your breakfast, you must make friends with my little boy and girl. Look after him well,

Martha," she said as she turned to leave the room, "and give him plenty to eat."

"I'll see to him, marm," said the servant, who was a rough girl, but good-nature itself. She proceeded to heap his plate with food, and poured him out a cup of nice hot coffee, which smelt delicious to the hungry boy. She was very proud of her hot buckwheat cakes, and Jack did ample justice to them, smothered as they were in butter and syrup.

When he had finished, he pleased Martha very much by helping her to wash up the breakfast things, and she was surprised and delighted to find how careful he was in drying and putting by the cups and saucers tidily in the cupboards.

He carried her in some buckets of water from the creek, and cleaned the knives.

"Is there anything else for me to do?" he asked presently.

"Can you work a bucksaw?" she said dubiously.

"Yes! I can," returned Jack. "I cut all my uncle's wood at Longview with one."

"Well! I'd be glad enough for a few logs," she said, "for the boys are so busy this morning, they've quite forgot it's baking day, and I want plenty o' wood."

"I'll cut it," cried Jack, delighted to be of use, and hastened off to the wood pile. Here he found the bucksaw, and cut off a number of short lengths of wood. He was proceeding to split them with an ax, when he found himself being surveyed by a little boy and girl who were standing in front of him hand-in-hand. The boy was about six, and the girl a year younger, and they gazed at Jack with admiring eyes.

"Are you Jack?" asked the boy shyly.

"Yes, I am," answered Jack, smiling at him.

"Well! I'm Teddy Stuart," answered the new arrival, evidently anxious to converse, "and this is Rita. She's my sister. Have you a sister?"

"No! I haven't," returned Jack, "but I've got a mother, though," he added, not to be outdone.

"I know that," said Teddy approvingly, "and you've come *hundreds* of miles to find her. I'd go a *million* to see my mother, if she went away."

"No! You wouldn't, Teddy," broke in Rita, speaking for the first time, "cos you're too little. You're ever so much littler than Jack. Jack!" she went on, with a funny grave look in her face, "my Daddy says you're a little hero, so I want to shake hands with you."

She held out a small hand, and shook Jack's brown paw very solemnly, as if it was an important ceremony. Teddy, not to be behindhand, shook hands also.

"I like heroes," Rita went on. "Daddy tells me stories about them doing such brave things in battles. What grand things have you done, Jack?"

Jack looked puzzled at this question, but Teddy helped him by asking in an awe-stricken voice, "Did you *kill* anybody, Jack?"

"Oh, no!" returned our little friend; "I never hurt nobody but those Mexican boys as set on me at Las Vegas. I tried to hurt *'em* all I could," he said honestly, "but they were too many of 'em and they whipped me."

"I wish I'd been there," cried Teddy valiantly. "I'd have helped you, Jack, and p'raps we'd have beaten them between us."

"I'm afeared they'd have had the best o' it anyhow," returned Jack, shaking his head.

Rita listened to this conversation with a frightened look in her brown eyes, but she felt a greater respect than heretofore for Teddy after his brave speech. Mrs. Stuart joined them at this moment, and seemed very pleased to see the work Jack had got through since breakfast.

"You are a useful boy," she remarked pleasantly;

you've wasted no time this morning. Now, children, I see you have already made friends with Jack. Help him to carry this firewood into the kitchen, and then take him about and show him the animals."

Delighted to be useful, Teddy and Rita helped Jack to carry in the logs, and soon the big wood-box behind the stove was quite full.

Then they took him off to a stable, where they showed him their two little ponies which their father had brought them from New York. Jack had never seen such tiny creatures before. They were real Shetlands, and their shaggy manes and long flowing tails delighted the western boy, who lingered near them as if quite fascinated. He utterly failed in his attempt to decide which he liked best, Teddy's black pony "Raven," or Rita's white one called "Snowball," for if the latter was the *prettiest*, "Raven," went the *fastest* of the two. They were dear little ponies and so quiet, they followed the children about like a couple of big dogs when they loosed them.

They came in their wanderings to the big corral or yard, where a great excitement was going on. Some cowboys were breaking in a very wild colt, and it was giving them no end of trouble. Mr. Stuart was present, and when he saw the children he put them into a safe place to watch the proceedings. Jack was very excited, as he had never seen a really wild broncho broken in before, and was most anxious to see it done.

It was so unmanageable, a cowboy had at last to lasso it with a lariat and throw it down. While two or three men kept it prostrate, the others quickly put on a saddle and bridle and strapped the "cinches" or girths up tight. The cowboy who was to ride the colt then gave a signal. The men let the animal struggle to its feet, and before it was

aware, the youth with a quick bound was seated in the saddle.

Then began a terrible fight between the man and the horse. The latter tried to get its head down between it fore-legs, arching up its back and bucking wildly about, trying to unseat its rider, who, however, sat firm as a rock, holding the reins tight. After the horse had plunged and reared for some time, the bars of the corral were let down, and the cowboy worked the refractory steed towards this opening and out on the prairie. Here the animal made a fresh fight for victory, and, as if inspired to try another method to get free of its unwelcome burden, it suddenly darted away full gallop across the plain. They thundered along for miles, the rider quite powerless to check the runaway, nor did he wish to. He let the horse go, and at last it began to weary, and, of its own accord, lessened the speed. Slower and slower it went, until it would have stopped altogether if the cowboy had permitted it. But this was his opportunity to show he was master, and accordingly he kept the colt going on, and when at last he turned its head towards home, and trotted it back to the corral, its sweat-stained coat, and drooping tail, showed that the victory was won and the wild spirit subdued. As it carried the cowboy quietly enough up to the waiting group of spectators, they knew that the worst was over, and the colt, after such a struggle, would never give the same trouble again.

Jack was very happy at the ranch, as every one took an interest in such a little traveler and was good to him. Mr. Stuart made him wild with pleasure, as he said he would like to do Steve Byrne a good turn for his kindness to the forlorn boy, and he intended to write to him at Longview, and offer to make him one of his cowboys. Jack knew Steve would like nothing better, and it pleased him to

think that his good-natured cousin would benefit through him.

Jack had been only three days with the Stuarts, when one evening a strange-looking vehicle, called a "buckboard," drawn by an old white mule, approached the ranch, and a tall, wiry old man jumped out and knocked at the door. He held himself very erect, and although his hair was gray, he looked many years younger than he really was. His appearance was hailed with shouts of delight, for he was well known and a favorite with all.

"Come in, man!" cried Mr. Stuart, greeting him like an old friend; "no one could be more welcome than yourself. I've not seen you for months."

"I've been up in Nebraska till lately," returned the man. "I stayed there a bit too long, as I ought to be in the Gunnison by now. Anyhow, I couldn't cross the Range without running in to have a look at you all."

"That's right, Joe," said Mr. Stuart. "You'll stay here the night, of course? Get your mule to his alfafa, and come on in to supper."

The man went off to the stables, and Jack felt in a great flutter of excitement, wondering if Mr. Stuart meant to ask the stranger to let him accompany him. A cowboy told him the man's name, and in Jack's eyes the newcomer was to be looked upon with respectful awe, for he was one of the most famous hunters in the West. He had long since earned the sobriquet among other hunters of "Champion Joe," from the long list of triumphs he had achieved in the destruction of wild animals.

Numberless mountain lions, bears, wolves, and other wild creatures had fallen victims to his unerring aim, and many a fierce fight for life had he had with dangerous foes. The hunter's fame had reached even the lonely village of Longview, and his name was quite familiar to Jack.

When Joe came in again, Mr. Stuart at once opened up the subject, told Jack's story briefly, and asked him to allow the little lad to be his companion.

"The boy can't go alone, Joe," he said, "and I'd sooner trust him to you than any one. I was going to keep him here this winter, but as this opportunity has occurred, I think it is pity to miss it, if you'll take him along. His people are somewhere on the Cochetopa Creek, and that can't be so very far the other side of the Divide."

"I'll take him for you," said the hunter. "Where is he?"

"Here, Jack, come along," called Mr. Stuart. "I can tell you, you're in luck to have fallen in with such a traveling companion. Here's the safest man to cross the mountains with, and he is going to take you with him."

Jack came forward, and looked in the grizzled, tough old face with something akin to awe. The bright, keen eyes looked searchingly at him in return, as if their owner would read him through, and then the veteran held out his hand, saying in a deep mellow voice that sounded pleasantly in Jack's ears, "Well, young un! So you and me's to be mates for a spell, eh? And I'm to keep the track clear of bears for you. Is that so?"

"I'm awfully skeared of bears," returned Jack, truthfully, "but I don't believe I'd be skeared of anything much if I were along with you;" and he looked confidently at the stalwart figure of the hunter.

"There's a genuine compliment for you, Joe," remarked Mr. Stuart, laughing. "You ought to appreciate that."

"Aye! so I do," returned "Champion Joe," well pleased with the boy's unfeigned admiration. "And now, kid, can you tell me whereabouts on the

Cochetopa Creek your folks have located themselves?"

Jack shook his head. He had come over two hundred and fifty miles on that one word *Cochetopa*, and now, when only about sixty miles from the nearest point of the creek, he had not the remotest idea if his parents lived near any town or village. He knew nothing beyond the name of the creek, and said so.

"That's a bit awkward," said "Champion Joe," "for that 'ere creek runs down from the Range for about fifty miles afore it joins the river; so I guess it'll be a trifle hard to find your folks."

"My dad does freighting where he is," ventured Jack.

"That's good," returned Joe, hopefully, "for there's more chance o' hearin' summat o' him as we get over the Range in some o' the villages we'll pass through."

"I think you'd better run off to bed, Jack," said Mrs. Stuart, "as you will have to be up early to-morrow morning."

"Yes," joined in the hunter, "get all the sleep you can. I start first thing in the mornin', as we ain't got no time to fool away. For all the sky's so bright, I'm mighty sure there's a snowstorm not far off, and I ain't one as enjoys a blizzard on the Range."

Jack felt too restless to sleep much, and at last, when he dozed off, he dreamt he was being pursued by a bear, and it was just catching him when "Champion Joe" came to his rescue, and carried him away, while the bear vanished at the sight of the hunter.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK CROSSES THE RANGE WITH "CHAMPION JOE."

THE next morning there was a small crowd to see the two travelers off, and every one seemed sorry to say good-by to Jack. The children gave him little keepsakes, and made him promise to come and see them again.

"Good-by, Jack," said Mrs. Stuart, kindly. "I hope you will get safely to your journey's end, and find your father and mother well. We hope we shall hear good news of you later on, and remember, we shall always be glad to see you here. Next time you must pay us a longer visit."

"Thank you very much, ma'am, for being so good to me," said Jack, who was too overcome to say much. The Stuarts had indeed treated the little wanderer kindly. That morning he had begged his hostess to take some of his pocket money (which Pedro had already refused), but she declined to accept it.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, quite horrified at the idea, "how could you suppose we would dream of taking any money from you?" And when he said good-by to her husband, the good-natured Englishman slipped a twenty-dollar bill into his hand, saying, "There, Jack, my boy! you're an honest lad, I feel sure, and I'd like to give you this little nest-egg to help you on."

No wonder Jack was almost speechless, but his new, kind friends understood and appreciated his

silent gratitude far more than if he had poured forth volumes of thanks.

Mrs. Stuart had given him a warm blanket and a woolen helmet for his head, and Jack found the comfort of them very soon, as, though the morning was bright and clear when they started, it got intensely colder as they got higher up the mountains. The road was very steep and rocky, and covered with small boulders, so that it was impossible to go faster than at a walk. They quickly left all ranches and signs of civilization behind, and came into a wonderfully wild region. Part of their way lay through a dense forest of pines, where some of the trees had been cut down, and dragged on one side to make a rough road for travelers. It was very lonely, and not a sound to be heard except the noise of the wheels and the mule's feet moving over the rocks.

Jack looked once or twice at fallen trunks of trees, half fearing that a bear might be concealed behind them, but Joe assured him there was little chance of their seeing one at that time.

"Most o' 'em 'll be hybernating—going to sleep in their dens for the winter," he said; "and if we did meet one, he'd be more likely to run away than to face us."

"Is that so?" asked Jack in surprise.

"Yes," replied the hunter, "a bear'll avoid a man as a rule, unless it's wounded or it's a she-bear with cubs. Those 'll fight sure enough, and dangerous things they are to tackle. We'll camp to-night at a log shanty near the top o' timber-line, where a mate of mine nearly lost his life. I'll tell you the story after supper."

"I'd like that," cried Jack, pleased at the promise of an adventure story.

Before long, they had to get out of the buckboard and walk to help the mule, which found it hard

enough to drag up any weight at all. It was very tiring for all, and none were sorry when they reached the lonely little hut where they were to stay for the night. "Captain," the mule, was seen to first. He was put into a tiny corral or yard close by, and given plenty of "baled" or compressed hay, which is always carried by people in wagons traveling long distances, where fodder is hard to procure. "Captain" at once set to work to enjoy his well-earned meal and rest, while Joe and Jack lit a fire and cooked their supper, which they also relished.

After they had finished, Champion Joe got out his pipe and started it; then, seating himself on a clump of wood he had rolled into the hut, he began his story.

"This mate of mine who got into this trouble with a bear was a rash young fellow who didn't know what danger meant, and often laughed and said he'd like to meet a bear as could scare him. About four years ago he was mining up here, and living in this very shanty. He was drilling in the rock for ore, and had a fair-sized prospect-hole, when one day he was comin' back here for his grub, and came face to face with a bear as had two cubs with her. Of course he ought to have run back to his prospect-hole, where he'd have been safe enough till she'd cleared off away. But, no! he was that reckless, he went straight for her and attacked her with his pickax, which was the only weapon he had. He'd no chance, however, against her, and many a time has he told me the terrible feeling he had when he struck out at her with all his might and jest missed her. She sent the pickax flying out of his hands the next moment, leaving him quite at her mercy. She caught him, and hugged and mangled him terribly. He'd jest sense enough left to remember that he'd once heard as a bear won't touch a *dead* man, so he, poor chap, tried it on as a last

chance for life. He lay quite stiff and quiet, and lucky for him the trick succeeded. She loosed her grip of him, and sniffed and sniffed round him, until I guess she thought she must have finished him off. Then she went away with her cubs and left him. My mate jest managed to crawl in here and shut the door, and here I found him an hour later, as near dead as any man I ever saw. The bear had torn him dreadfully and bitten him, and I tell you he took some nursing to pull him through; but he did live, and is going still. However, you may be sure as he don't scoff and joke any more about bears."

"I should think not, indeed," said Jack. "What an escape he had! Did the bear come back again?"

"No," answered Joe; "I followed her up carefully, and shot her with that 'ere rifle of mine as you see there in the corner. But I didn't fool with her, for I've done more bear-hunting than any man in the States, and know by experience you must be cautious. Yes, I killed her, and the two cubs as well. She was a grizzly, and a fierce un, too."

"Are there many different kinds of bear on these mountains?" asked Jack, who was very interested in the subject.

"A good many," returned the hunter. "We've got the black, brown, and cinnamon bears, which 'll avoid you if they can; and then we've the grizzlies and silver-tipped bears, which are a kind of grizzly. The latter ain't quite so fierce as the real grizzly, but ain't pleasant to face when they're wounded."

Joe went on to tell how hunters tracked the creatures by the way they tore up ant-holes and rolled over big stones in their clumsy way of walking. They were often caught in traps set for them at the time when the wild raspberries and gooseberries were ripe, as then they came wandering down along the creeks, looking for the berries they liked so well.

Next morning, before they started, Joe showed Jack the exact spot where the fight had taken place between the miner and the bear, and then they put "Captain" into the buckboard, and began the last stage of the ascent.

It was a wonderfully clear day, and as they looked down the country lay spread out below them like a gigantic map. The ranches, creeks, and villages all looked so tiny and scattered to them, gazing as they did over hundreds of miles of prairie land.

Above them the sharp peaks seemed to pierce the keen blue sky, and the snow still lying on the mountain sides was so dazzling from the sun's rays that "Champion Joe" put on a pair of dark blue "goggles," and tied a piece of black veiling over Jack's face, to protect their eyes from getting snow-blind.

Higher and higher they went slowly on, and Joe remarked, "Well, Jack, I guess we're about as near heaven on earth to-day, in one way of speaking, as you've ever been in your life afore, eh? Don't it look close? But, I say, young un, what's up?"

"I don't know," said Jack, very faintly. "I've gone to feel so queer. I can hardly breathe, and my head aches as if it were going to burst."

"Lie down, Jack, for a bit," said the hunter, kindly. "It's the great height as we're up. This air affects some folks terribly. I've seen strong men helpless and hardly able to move, lower down than we are. We're close to the top now, so we'll wait till you feel a bit better."

Jack did feel better after a short rest, and, with Joe's help, managed to creep slowly on, although he felt very ill. At the top they found it bitterly cold, as some clouds had rolled rapidly up in a few hours and obscured the bright sun. Jack shivered in spite of the blanket Joe wrapped him in. The descent on the other side of the range was even

harder on the mule than the terrible up-hill drag, and Joe had to tie the wheels of the buckboard to prevent it running onto "Captain." The road was so steep and stony, he could hardly keep his footing at times, and in one place there was nothing but a broad ledge cut out of the side of a rock, with a natural wall on one side and a terrible precipice sloping away on the other.

It made Jack feel so giddy looking down such an awful depth, that Joe, seeing how white he was, advised him to hold on to the back of the buckboard and keep his eyes fixed on the mule.

"Trust yourself to 'Captain,'" he said, "and I promise you he ain't likely to go over that, if caution is of any account. He ain't the one to lose *his* head on roads like this, as he knows 'em so well."

Jack followed the advice given him, and got on much better, and when they had got down a little way, his head felt less heavy, and he soon was all right again.

Towards evening they approached a small settlement at the foot of the pass, called Redwood. As they drove in, they found the people in a state of great excitement. The Sheriff of the county had run down and caught a band of horse-thieves just outside the village a few hours before. The Sheriff and his men had won the fight, captured the thieves, and secured the stolen horses in corrals through the village. The place was almost in an uproar, and our travelers had some difficulty in finding a place where they could lodge themselves and their mule for the night. The Sheriff and his party seemed to fill the village, and some of the crowd round the jail, where the horse-thieves were imprisoned, never moved away all night, fearing the robbers might try to break out before morning, when they were to be escorted by a strong body of men to the nearest

town to await their trial. Jack, however, was too tired to enter much into the great excitement going on, and was glad enough, after some supper, to wrap himself up in his blanket, and go to sleep on the floor of a tiny shanty outside the village.

CHAPTER XII.

AT LAST.

The next morning Jack was quite rested and very eager to join Joe, who proposed they should go and see the start of the prisoners. They walked towards the jail, and arrived there just as the party were starting. The horse-thieves, eight in number, were riding in the midst of a band of well-armed horsemen, who were ever on the alert to detect the first attempt to escape from any of the prisoners, who were all pinioned. They were a sullen, desperate-looking set of men, who scowled fiercely at the restless crowd as they surged round them, almost pushing against the horses in their efforts to see all they could of the far-famed, evil gang, who at last had fallen into the hands of justice. At a signal from the Sheriff the little band moved away, and slowly trotted out of sight. When they had disappeared from view, every one followed the Sheriff (who had remained behind with two of his men) near a big corral, where the captured horses were still standing.

Jack and Joe went with the crowd and stood looking at the horses, while the Sheriff began busily entering the different brands marked on the animals in his note-book.

"What's that for?" asked Jack.

"To help find out the owners," returned Joe. "You see the Sheriff'll advertise these brands, and

the colors of the horses, and then folks as have lost any 'll come and identify 'em."

Suddenly Jack gave a cry of delight, and clambering over the bars of the corral, rushed into the midst of the loose horses towards a yellow-coated broncho. He flung his arms round the horse's neck and fairly hugged it. Then, keeping hold of the shaggy mane, he led the animal towards the bars, where his friend stood staring in astonishment.

"Joe," he cried, half crying with joy, "here's 'Buckskin,' our old 'Buck,' as I've told you about."

Every one looked at the excited boy, and the Sheriff glanced rather suspiciously at him, for, strange to say, the brand on the yellow broncho had puzzled him more than all the others, being quite unknown to him.

He called out sharply, "Say! what does that boy know about that horse? Tell him to come here."

Jack led "Buckskin" up to where he stood, and said quietly, "This horse belongs to my dad. Here's his brand, V. C., on his hip, and he has an old scar that was done once when he was shot just afore we got him."

"Where is it?" asked the Sheriff, dubiously.

"Here!" returned Jack, promptly, as he lifted "Buckskin's" mane and showed the place plain enough where a bullet had once passed through the neck. "I could swear to 'Buckskin' anywhere."

"You're right, my lad," said the Sheriff, after looking carefully at the scar. "And who's your dad?"

"George Wilson," answered Jack. "He lives on the Cochetopa Creek, and freights up and down the mountains."

"Does any one know George Wilson, of Cochetopa Creek?" asked the Sheriff, appealing to the crowd.

A man stood forward and said, "I guess I saw

the man you want last week, if he's an Englishman. I didn't know his name, for he's only just moved up to a small ranch about fifteen miles from here. I do believe when I met him as he was drivin' a sorrel broncho, the same color as that one, but I never noticed the brand."

"Joe! Joe! d'you hear that?" exclaimed Jack, in his joyful surprise forgetting the Sheriff and every one else. "We're close to home after all. Isn't it grand?"

The Sheriff looked puzzled at this outburst, until "Champion Joe," who was well known to him, came forward and briefly told Jack's story. He also testified to Jack's good character, and finally persuaded the officer to give over the stolen horse into their hands. A proud boy was our hero when, a few hours later, he drove out of Redwood in Joe's buckboard, having "Buckskin" securely fastened on behind.

The weather had decidedly changed since the day before, and the sky looked dark and lowering as they drove along the prairie road. Jack, however, was in the wildest spirits, as he drew so close to the end of his long journey, and thought how soon he would see his dear Father and Mother.

"We'll make your home by evening if we have good luck," said Joe, cheerfully; "but I'm feared as we're in for a snowstorm, and may be a blizzard."

Joe was right. As they got a little further on their way, the snow began to fall in heavy flakes, and faster and faster they came down. Worse still! Far away up in the mountains above them they could hear a warning roar that proclaimed the advent of a prairie storm. Joe urged "Captain" on with all his might.

"We're in for a blizzard," he cried; "it's coming on quick, and 'll soon overtake us. Cochetopa Creek is only a few miles ahead of us now, and if we could

get that far we'd find quaking aspens that would break the worst of the storm, and we could shelter there till morning."

On they struggled, but the cold was intense, and long before they could reach the creek the blizzard struck them with full force. The snow froze as it fell, and cut their faces, while the icy tempest whirled up clouds of these sharp particles, blinding Joe. He made Jack get under the tough Buffalo robe, but the fierce cold was penetrating even through that. In a short time Joe found they had wandered off the road, and after driving aimlessly about in the storm, trying to find it again, he had at last to give it up and acknowledge that they were *lost*. It was an awful sensation, and Joe was puzzled how to proceed, as "Captain" stood with his back to the storm and refused to stir.

The hunter knew they must all freeze to death if they stayed there any length of time, and he determined to try the only expedient left, which was to abandon the buckboard and trust themselves to the animals.

With difficulty he put a bridle on "Buckskin," who was trembling with fright and cold, and, hoisting Jack up on his back, managed to tie him on with a bit of rope. He then unharnessed the mule and scrambled on it himself.

"We must try and keep together, if possible," said he; "and now, off we go!"

The animals plunged forward amidst the drifting snow and shrieking storm, but in a few minutes they were swept apart, and Jack missed his companion. He pulled up and called in vain for Joe; but the storm roared round, drowning everything in the darkness. At last Jack felt the wisest thing was to leave himself entirely to "Buckskin," and not even try to guide him. The cold was beginning to stupefy the boy, and he had a strange feeling of

numbness growing over him. The good old horse plodded steadily on, while Jack laid the reins on his back, saying with a sob, "Go on 'Buck,' I shall die soon if you don't save me." Suddenly "Buckskin" stopped, and, although Jack had just sense to be aware of it, he was quite unable to rouse himself from the deadly stupor he had fallen into, and without the rope that tied him on "Buckskin" he would long before have slipped off on to the ground. But help was at hand. "Buckskin" had stopped by some bars. Like all prairie horses he was very clever, and, finding his rider made no effort to get off and put the bars down for him, he set to work to try and do it himself. He got his head under the top pole, and lifted it up in its place until one end fell down. He was working at the second, when a dog's bark sounded close by, and very soon a light appeared in the doorway of a small log-house inside the bars, as a man came out and looked about.

It was too dark for him to see the horse outside, and Jack was quite unconscious by this time, so it would have fared badly with our friends in the storm if the dog had not plunged forward over the snow and commenced barking frantically round them. This surprised the man, and, having got a lantern, he came towards the bars.

"What is it, Jim? Only coyotes, I believe. You silly old dog!" he said at first, as the dog rushed back to him; but as he got closer, he saw the dark form of a horse.

"Hello! What have we here?" he exclaimed, as he let down the bars. "A loose horse! Why, I declare, it's old 'Buck' back again! But what has he got on his back? It looks like a child!"

He quickly led the horse to the door, and by the light of the lantern untied the rope, and carried the motionless figure into the house.

"Here, wife," he called out, "come and see to

this child, while I take the horse to the stable. It's the strangest thing I ever knew. 'Buck' gets stolen, and to-night I find him at the bars in this blizzard, with a kid on his back!"

A woman took the boy and laid him on a couch some distance from the fire. She then removed the blanket, and was chafing the stiff limbs to bring back the circulation, when her husband returned, having made "Buckskin" as comfortable as possible in his own stable.

"Look! he's coming round a bit," said the woman, hopefully. "Pour some warm coffee between his lips."

The man obeyed, and the liquid seemed to revive the unconscious boy. He sighed and opened his eyes. He saw a gentle face bending over him, which was familiar, indeed, to him.

"Oh, Mother darling! I ain't dead, and I've found you at last!" was his joyful cry, and the next moment he was folded in her loving arms.

Such a meeting as this one between Jack and his long-lost parents is indescribable, and we must draw a veil over the first few hours of their happy reunion.

"Oh, George," said the comforted mother later on, when Jack had quite recovered, "isn't it wonderful how it all happened? To think that old 'Buck' should have brought our own little Jack to our very door!"

"Yes, indeed," returned her husband. "What a merciful thing it was that 'Jim' heard them at the bars, for Jack was very nearly done for with the awful cold."

Tears of joy had poured down the cheeks of the parents when they discovered it was really their darling who had come to them in the storm, and they did not forget to kneel down and thank God for His marvelous preservation of their child.

"Mother," said Jack, "you were right; you told me to ask God to take care of us until we met again, and He has done it."

"Yes, that He has!" returned his mother; "and we have much to thank Him for."

"You stick to Him right through your life, Jack, as you've begun," said George Wilson, solemnly, "for He's the best guide and protector any man can have."

"I will, Daddy," answered the boy, firmly.

Jack was soon able to give an account of his adventure in the blizzard, and expressed great anxiety about the fate of his friend, "Champion Joe."

"It's madness to look for him to-night," said George Wilson, "but I'll be out first thing and seek him in the morning."

It was a great relief to them all when about daybreak the next day they were roused by a knock at the door, which proved to be the hunter himself. He had come to ask for help in finding *his* missing companion, and you may imagine his joyful surprise, to learn that Jack, in spite of the storm, had safely reached home and his journey was over! The mule had managed to struggle to the creek, where he and his master had sheltered among the quaking aspens until morning, the latter being in an agony of mind all night about Jack.

The buckboard was brought to the Wilsons' house with great difficulty during the day, and "Buckskin" and "Rufus" had to lend their services to drag it, light as it was, through the terrible snowdrifts. The road was so bad "Champion Joe" had to stay two or three days with Jack's people, but he never grudged the delay, as he had become very fond of his little traveling companion, and he was delighted to see the happiness of the three who had been parted so long.

Jack's mother had grown much stronger, and

there was every hope of her perfect recovery after a longer residence in their new home.

The evening of the next day after his return home, Jack was sitting with the others round the stove, and with his hand clasped tight in his mother's, gave them an outline of his adventures through which we have followed him. They listened breathlessly, and the mother grew pale at the description of his desertion and subsequent illness. What risks her child had run!

When he had finished they were all silent for a short time; then his mother said, "God has been good to us. Here have we been mourning you as dead, and all the time He was leading you to us through all these perils and dangers. Have you forgot the hymns we used to sing at Longview, Jack?"

"No, Mother, I've sung them many a time. Jeff and Pedro liked to hear them ever so well. Let's have some to-night."

"We will, Jack," said his father. "It would be quite like the old days."

Soon the log-house resounded with their voices as they sang their favorite hymns. When they had finished up with the last lines of

> "And nightly pitch my moving tent
> A day's march nearer home,"

Jack exclaimed, "Somehow I feel as if I've got safe home now!"

"Nay, laddie, not yet," said his mother, gently. "We can never get to our true home until we have passed through the dark valley of death. We are all wanderers here, and in the same way as the thought of this earthly home and Dad and me cheered you on through your journey, so should the thought of our Heavenly home, and our Father awaiting us, help us to face the trials and troubles

we must meet all our lives through. And now, my dearie, it's getting late. Let me put you to bed."

Shortly after, with her loving kiss on his forehead, Jack, who had so often felt sad and lonely at Longview, fell asleep with a happy smile on his face.

For the sake of dead Aunt Sue the Wilsons never wrote a word of reproach to their deceitful brother-in-law, who left Longview very soon after Jack's disappearance.

Jack had not seen the last of the good friends he had made on his journey. He went often to Swift Creek Ranch, where he saw not only the Stuarts but also Pedro and Señor at times. Steve became one of Mr. Stuart's cowboys, where he was perfectly happy and gave every satisfaction.

Mr. Stuart also promised Jack that when he was old enough, if he still wished it, he should join his band of cowboys, and with this promise Jack was quite content. About a year after Jack's reunion with his parents Steve, in one of the "round-ups" of cattle, came across Jeff Ralston, who was thankful to hear that, contrary to all his sad anticipations, the boy had not, after all, perished on the prairie.

And now, safe in his happy home, after all he had gone through, we must say good-by to little Jack, leaving him growing up still the same devoted boy to his parents as the little fellow who so bravely set out on his tremendous journey, determined in spite of all danger and difficulties to find Mother and Cochetopa Creek!

THE END.

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